

**THE POETRY OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI
BY PAUL W. HULLAH**

PhD
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
1991





Dante Gabriel, Christina, Frances and William Michael Rossetti
in the garden at Tudor House, Cheyne Walk. From a photograph
taken in 1863 by the Rev. C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll).

ABSTRACT

Twentieth century critical work on Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-94) is sparse. Short discussions of her poetry have appeared intermittently in journals such as *Victorian Poetry*, or as chapters or parts of chapters in books such as Sir Maurice Bowra's *The Romantic Imagination* (1949) and Professor W. W. Robson's *Critical Essays* (1966). Only with the recent publication of David A. Kent's edition *The Achievement Of Christina Rossetti* (1987) and Antony H. Harrison's *Christina Rossetti in Context* (1988), has sustained, critical (as opposed to biographically determined) study of this poet's work been offered.

This thesis seeks to isolate thematic elements in the works of Christina Rossetti by offering close, detailed textual readings of the poems. Past commentators have rightly recognised and applauded the rhythmic and metrical craftsmanship displayed in her lyric verse, but this monopoly of attention afforded to the formal felicities of the poetry has been at the expense of adequate interpretation of its content. This study aims to show that Rossetti's rigorously controlled use of language and symbolism indicates that there are important levels of meaning implicit in the poetry other than that produced by the biographical decoding which many critics have hitherto favoured.

This thesis proposes that, from her earliest 'secular' lyrics through longer pieces such as *Goblin Market* (1862) and *The Prince's Progress* (1866), Rossetti's verse continually resists complacency of interpretation, subtly questioning and subverting the traditions of writing - lyric, fairy tale, and quest myth - it simultaneously extends. Gradually and persuasively constructing a case for the inability of poetic tradition to cope with the expression of an active, female identity, *Monna Innominata* (1881) deconstructs the poetics of lyric tradition, casting together mediaeval, renaissance and Victorian ideologies. This remarkable sonnet cycle disturbs the conventions of the love-lyric and forms the most concentrated, sustained demonstration of the struggle to articulate the self outwith patriarchal poetic tradition to be found in the Rossetti canon. The painful sense of irresolution and despair which pervades *Monna Innominata* sheds important light upon the almost exclusive production of heavily devotional literature by Christina Rossetti in the final stages of her career.

DECLARATION

This thesis is the product of original research
and writing done by myself over the last
five years.

Signed

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the British Academy for funding the first three years of research which went towards the writing of this thesis. My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Aidan Day, my initial supervisor, for patiently and conscientiously steering me into valuable areas of reading throughout the earlier days of my research. For his diligence and continuing encouragement, I am eternally grateful. My deepest thanks go to Professor Paul Edwards for his support, boundless knowledge, judicious advice and tireless criticism during the latter stages of my study. More than anything else, his dazzling enthusiasm for literature and for life lit the dimmer hours along the way. I am grateful, finally, to Sian, for all her wise counsel and much more.

TEXTUAL NOTE

The only abbreviation used throughout the course of the thesis text is that of *Works*, referring to W. M. Rossetti ed. *The Poetical Works Of Christina Rossetti* (London; Macmillan, 1904). This is the standard text used in the study and, for the reader's convenience, page references to the *Works* are given in the main body of the text. Unfortunately, Professor R. W. Crump's Variorum Edition of *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State U. P., 1979-) was incomplete (the third and final volume is still eagerly awaited) at the time of writing up, hence the consistent citation of the W. M. Rossetti edition. Where the date of composition of a work is specifically relevant to a particular argument, the chronology was cross-checked with the available Crump text in Volume I of the variorum edition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. DREAMS AND DREAMING	43
3. <i>GOBLIN MARKET</i>	94
4. <i>THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS</i>	133
5. <i>MONNA INNOMINATA</i>	185
6. CONCLUSION: THE DEVOTIONAL POETRY	318
BIBLIOGRAPHY	374

PREFACE

The facts of Christina Rossetti's life, though less fully documented for scholarly purposes than might be wished, are fairly well known. Though it is decidedly not the purpose of this study to emphasise biographical details, it is pertinent to preface it with a brief resummation of the poet's own history. Past criticism of Christina Rossetti's work has been so plagued by biographical determinism that, before proceeding to offer a new reading of the work, it is helpful to be aware of what the poetry has traditionally been thought to express, the autobiography of its author.

Christina Rossetti was born on the 5th of December, 1830, at No. 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, London. Her father, Gabriele Rossetti, had sought political refuge in England in 1824 after fleeing his native Naples where he had found fame as an operatic librettist and also worked as a museum curator. In 1826, he married Frances Lavinia Polidori (whose brother John later became Byron's infamous travelling physician) and they settled together in London. Gabriele taught Italian, eventually becoming Professor of English at King's College, London, publishing volumes of poetry in his native language and prose works in which he

undertook detailed studies of what he identified as the philosophical subtext of Dante's writings. Christina was the youngest of the four children born into this intellectual but financially unsound family atmosphere. Her eldest sister, Maria Francesca was to become a nun. Her eldest brother, Gabriel Charles Dante, was founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement in painting, poet of ravished beauty and of engaging style. The next brother, William Michael Rossetti, became a diarist, editor and reminiscer - all of note, all to be mentioned below. Christina Georgina Rossetti became a poet. Overcoming chronic, crippling illness from the age of fifteen onwards, she wrote verses which, in her lifetime, were amongst the most popular of the day. At the height of her popularity, she rivalled the Poet Laureate of the period, Alfred Lord Tennyson. One contemporary reviewer insisted that 'her place among the highest English poets is secure', whilst another enthused over her verses as 'perfectly rendered, so fragile and yet so flawless' (1). Seventeen years after her death, Christina Rossetti's reputation was still unquestioned; Ford Madox Ford, in an essay in *The Critical Attitude*, went further than most with his recommendations, all the while reflecting the esteem in which his subject's work was held. His opinion was unqualified and emphatic.

Christina Rossetti seems to us to be
the most valuable poet that the Victorian age
produced. (2)

Though Christina Rossetti's dexterity and ingenuity with rhyme and metre, in plain, direct language, is as highly regarded today as it was

when her work first appeared, time and critical opinion has not been so kind in its analysis of the content of her verse and the philosophy of self-denial and abnegation which it has been understood to express. For various reasons, twentieth century criticism of Christina Rossetti's writings has tended to overlook the subtle, symbolic nuances of her poetry (and prose) in favour of a largely dismissive overview which sees her life as more interesting than the poems which, it is proposed, form a simple diary of sad existence. As previously noted, this search for the author behind the writing has plagued Rossetti scholarship, and one of the aims of this study is to locate levels of meaning in the poems which, for whatever reason, beg more than a reductive biographical decoding. The time for exploring these elements is long overdue and is the way forward to resurrecting the literary reputation of a currently undervalued and understudied Victorian woman poet.

The biographical bias which critics have exercised in their appraisals of this poet's body of work has been unfortunate, but is perhaps understandable. The definitive biography of Christina Rossetti is yet to be written. Of the studies in existence, Professor Lona Mosk Packer's *Christina Rossetti* (1963) is by far the most detailed, but is ultimately rendered largely worthless owing to its author's repeated insistence upon a lifelong, secret love affair between Christina and the artist William Bell Scott, which is both improbable and unsupported by concrete evidence (3). Georgina Battiscombe's *Christina Rossetti; A Divided Life* is overly sentimental and too heavily based upon the *Memoir* of William

Michael Rossetti (*Works*, pp. xlv-lxxi), as are all twentieth century studies of Christina Rossetti's life, to shed any useful new light upon its subject (4).

Christina Rossetti wrote poetry communicating a sad, resigned outlook which, at a straightforward level, might be held (and *has* been held) as accurately reflecting her own experience of a consciously repressed, sad and disappointed life. It is a life that is easy to summarise. An attractive and lively child, Christina became withdrawn in her teens as a series of debilitating illnesses drained her health and, at times, her spirit. Though she moved in a lively London social set of scholars, painters and literary figures, Christina Rossetti never married. James Collinson, a lesser painter of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was the first serious suitor; differences in religious leanings (Christina was always a High Anglican, James Collinson was not) led to Collinson's proposal of 1848 being graciously declined, accepted over the next two years whilst Collinson feigned a reversion to Protestantism, then ultimately re-declined. The crusty scholar, Charles Bagot Cayley, was the second admirer; he knew Christina for thirty six years. Fastidious in every point bar religion - where he exhibited the shifting inclinations of a dilettante - he was loved by her but never became her lover. His proposal of marriage, in 1866, was also turned down, again for religious reasons.

Matters of love aside, Christina Rossetti had an enigmatic personality. Subdued, reserved and well known for her shyness, she never lived an outwardly active life; it might be said that she lived expressively through her poetry. Her earliest extant poem is a dedicatory octet (*Works*, p. 82), dated by William Michael Rossetti as written on 27th April 1842 - the work of an eleven year old girl. In 1847, when Christina Rossetti was only sixteen, her maternal grandfather, Gaetano Polidori privately printed and bound a collection of her juvenalia. The printing took place in Polidori's garden shed above Regent's Park Canal and the unofficial collection, titled *Verses by Christina G. Rossetti* (1847), became Christina's first published poetry. Officially, her first volume of poetry appeared in 1862. *Goblin Market, and Other Poems* was the first Pre-Raphaelite verse to attract public attention and met with universal acclaim. Four years later, *The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems*, featuring, as had its predecessor, designs by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, consolidated Christina Rossetti's strong reputation as a writer to whom clarity of expression and lyrical fluency were as second nature. *Sing-Song, a Nursery Rhyme Book* contained 120 plates by the illustrator Arthur Hughes and appeared in 1872, two years after *Commonplace and Other Short Stories*, an excursion into prose which, as much as anything else, confirmed that it was in the area of poetry that the author's major talent lay. The children's book *Speaking Likenesses*, again illustrated by Hughes, was published in 1874; the same year saw the appearance of *Annus Domini, a Prayer for each Day of the Year, founded on a text of Holy Scripture*, the first of the heavily devotional tracts which

indicated the direction in which Christina Rossetti's work was latterly to progress. *Seek and Find*, a double series of short studies of the Benedicite (1879), *Called To Be Saints: the Minor Festivals devotionally studied* (1881), *Letter and Spirit*, Notes on the Commandments (1883), *Time Flies, a reading Diary* (1885), and *The Face of the Deep, a Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892) form the series of further devotional prose works published during Christina Rossetti's lifetime. *A Pageant, and Other Poems* (1881), a new and enlarged edition of *Poems* (1890), and, in 1893, a volume of *Verses* reprinted from *Called to be Saints*, *Time Flies*, and *The Face of the Deep*, complete the poetry published during the author's lifetime. The semi-autobiographical novella *Maude, A Story for Girls*, written in 1850 and containing half a dozen original verses, was posthumously published in 1897. In 1904, William Michael Rossetti edited *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes* composed by himself. This has since been the standard text of Christina Rossetti's poetry, and will be so used in this study. This is not for reason of any claim to consummate scholarship which might be made for the 1904 edition - it is a work notorious for its inconsistencies, annoying lapses in chronology and lack of editorial objectivity. The William Michael Rossetti edition is simply the most complete volume we have to date. At the time of writing, the third volume of Rebecca Crump's proposed three volume variorum edition *Complete Poems Of Christina Rossetti* is eagerly awaited and will, when completed, be a boon to Rossetti scholars, the date for the appearance of such a work being long overdue.

Christina Rossetti became extremely ill in the later years of her stifled life. She was brave and steadfast, but cancer overcame her gradually and in 1894, on the morning of 29th December, she gave up the struggle. She is buried in Highgate Cemetery, in the same grave as her mother, to whom she dedicated much of her work. She is not read as much as Tennyson now. If read at all, if included in anthologies, Christina Rossetti is regarded as alien to the Victorian tradition, an anomaly interesting for her marginality, her awkward simplicity of tone in an age of ornateness and verbosity. This study aims to show that her marginality to tradition was consciously sought and utilised by Rossetti in her best work as a subversion of the patriarchally established poetic canon. It is my belief that Christina Rossetti needs to be looked at again in the light of twentieth century poetics and the radical criticism running after (though without the two, I would make the same case). Any poet who writes contrary to a substantial tradition, merits consideration on that ground at least. Rossetti was a woman, ensnared in a period when to be a woman was to be expected to be silent, and she tried to give woman a voice. Some of the radical shifts in sensibility and bias which her poetry dramatises have been overlooked (or actively ignored) by commentators who have mistaken her quiet, resigned tone for one of passive submission. This study seeks to redress the balance a little. Knowing that ideology masquerades as truth in the tradition of poetry inherited by poets such as herself, Rossetti seeks to illuminate the traps set by a male tradition of writing which a woman must negotiate, avoid, re-set. Poem by poem, the idea of the stability of

'truth' is reassessed in one way or another. The ways were chosen carefully because of the age. In her finest poetry, the notion of absolutism is addressed and deftly rejected in favour of relativism.

Christina Rossetti's poetry is above all else aware of its own limitations. It consistently refutes the authority of the patriarchal, male determined tradition within which it superficially operates, and yet can only exist within that age and that tradition. Religious faith is to be recontextualised and painfully doubted, and only offered unambiguously as the route to salvation in the later writing. This unwillingness to embrace certainty (finally relinquished in the face of divine instruction) is the cause of many contradictions within the poetry of Christina Rossetti, and it is the presence of these contradictions, the sense of unease the reader experiences, the sense that much of the poetry simply *does not add up*, which makes Rossetti's best work enigmatic, and singularly attractive.

NOTES

- 1) These extracts are taken from, respectively, Seed, Rev. T. A., 'Review of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*' in *Great Thoughts* (1862) and an anonymous reviewer in *The Daily News*. Both are included in 'Extracts From Reviews' in Rossetti, W. M., ed., *Poems of Christina Rossetti* (London; Macmillan, 1904) pp. xv-xix

- 2) Ford (pseud. Hueffer), Ford Madox, 'Modern Poetry' in *The Critical Attitude* (London; Duckworth, 1911) pp. 173-90, quotation p. 179
- 3) Packer, Lona Mosk, *Christina Rossetti* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1963)
- 4) Battiscombe, Georgina, *Christina Rossetti, A Divided Life* (London; Constable, 1981)

1. INTRODUCTION

For all that was but showed what all was not...
Christina Rossetti, 'An Old World Thicket'

I

In 1842 Christina Rossetti produced a short poem called 'The Chinaman' (*Works*, pp. 82-3) pronounced by her brother, William Michael Rossetti, to be 'quite, or very nearly, the first thing that Christina wrote in verse' (*Works*, p. 464). The twelve year old girl's effort was prompted by an assignment which the same elder brother had been given at school.

The year 1842 was the year of the Anglo-Chinese Opium War. I was told by one of my school masters to make an original composition on the subject of China, and I think the composition had to be in verse. What I wrote I have totally forgotten. Christina saw me at work, and chose to enter the poetic lists. She produced the present lines. (*Ibid*)

William Michael recalls discussing 'The Chinaman' with his sister three months before her death in 1894, making the following entry in his diary on October 9th 1894;

Saw Christina, who is surprisingly cheerful, considering. She recited to me her old verses about a Chinaman's pigtail... (1)

Elsewhere, William Michael concludes that the poem is 'not of high importance to the literary world' (*Works*, p. 465)- whether or not this is so, 'The Chinaman' is my starting point here.

THE CHINAMAN

'Centre of Earth!' a Chinaman he said,
And bent over a map his pig-tailed head, -
That map in which, portrayed in colours bright,
China, all dazzling, burst upon the sight;
'Centre of Earth!' repeatedly he cries,
'Land of the brave, the beautiful, the wise!'
Thus he exclaimed; when lo his words arrested
Showed what sharp agony his head had tested.
He feels another tug - another, and another -
And quick exclaims, 'Hallo! what's now the bother?'
But, soon, alas, perceives. And, 'Why, false night,
Why not from men shut out the hateful sight?
The faithless English have cut off my tail,
And left me my sad fortunes to bewail.
Now in the streets I can no more appear,
For all the other men a pig-tail wear.'
He said, and furious cast into the fire
His tail: those flames became its funeral-pyre.

This solidly constructed piece, with its plain pentametrical couplets, already manifests the poetic control for which Christina Rossetti's verse has always been praised. The rhyming is lively, the use of caesurae intelligent and the symbolism is managed in a mature manner. The poem also exhibits a sensitive appreciation of the predicament of the Chinese in the political atmosphere of the day - their refusal to trade in opium being met, in the justificatory words of Thomas Carlyle, by England's decision

...to argue with them, in cannon-shot at last,
and convince them that they ought to trade! (2)

'The Chinaman' is a piece which may be read at two distinct levels. A historical reading might focus on the poem's ironic presentation of British imperialism and its effects. An investigation of the poem at a different level, however, may produce a less historically specific

reading. The text constructs a vignette which, concisely and effectively, introduces and analyses the concept of identity. The Chinaman is involved in an identity quest, dramatised by the use of very basic, easily interpreted symbols, which, in a deceptively nonchalant manner, questions notions of representation and signification. Complete with the pig-tail which signifies his (national) identity, the Chinaman is first introduced in the poem staring at a map. In doing so, he presents the image of one attempting to locate himself with regard to a fixed system, the frame of reference before him. He is, so to speak, placing himself, identifying himself. "Centre of Earth!" repeatedly he cries', as he perceives the point, China, from which he is signified, 'The Chinaman', as having origin. From the basis of this certainty, the text intimates an endeavour towards establishing a 'Centre', a principle of intelligibility from which stability may proceed. China is projected as not just the central defining factor of the Chinaman's identity, but as a centering principle in general. Within the fiction of the poem, the Chinaman's identity becomes not an absolute, but a destabilised, relative concept. Lexically, the poem reflects this destabilisation; the writing, too, desires an ordering centre, around which its signifiers may close in blissful certainty. But this is not to be so, for the oriental or for the poem. '(W)ords arrested', a 'sharp agony' is felt in the text as its complacency is dislodged, its self-justifying pattern of signification abruptly underwritten by the intrusion of an opposing ideology and system of value - 'The faithless English have cut off my tail'. The Chinaman is no longer whole; unity of reference has been violently demolished in the metaphorical terms established by the poem. Reduced (or is it promoted?) to this recognition of the relativity involved in

the sphere of signification, the text itself loses singularity of import - 'For all the other men a pig-tail wear' - as the sarcastic rejoinders displace the initial value of the 'pig-tail' signifier, re-allocating its meaning now to a different metaphorical status. The poem closes with the distressed speaker wielding a tone of (active) indignation at the (passive) self-gratifying observations with which it opened. It forms a denial of the premises initially offered as reliable reference points.

He said, and furious cast into the fire
His tail: those flames became its funeral-pyre.

This ceremony symbolises a rejection of the system of signification, marker of identity, alluded to at the start of the text. The protagonist sacrifices that which guaranteed the stability of his identity as a 'Chinaman', he cremates his pig-tail. In doing so, no new fixed identity is established in the text: its purpose is to negate the possibility of such a fixed position. In this important respect, 'The Chinaman' may be termed an open-ended text.

The reading of 'The Chinaman' I have given offers an extra dimension to the text by which (over and above the fact of the date of its conception) it may be regarded as an apposite poem with which to preface a study of the writing of Christina Rossetti. It prefigures, I think, the type of subtle semantic strategy operational in the majority of Christina Rossetti's poems. This poetry enacts a conscious interrogation of the system of values from which it might initially seem to derive its energies. The text engages itself in discourse which

refuses any one fixed position of authority. In doing so, a destabilisation of notions of complacency is effected, disrupting all manner of certitude, wilfully exchanging fixity of reference and closure for plurality of meaning and open-endedness. It is a poetry aware of its own form and limitations. All these functions are carried out within a poetics rooted in symbol and begging for an (inter)textual, rather than a biographical/historical reading.

II

The publication, in 1979, of the first volume of Rebecca Crump's yet incomplete variorum edition of *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti* has generated fresh critical interest in a poet hitherto neglected for over half a century by the academic world (3). Two recent book-length studies - *The Achievement Of Christina Rossetti* (1987), a collection of essays edited by David A. Kent, and Antony H. Harrison's *Christina Rossetti In Context* (1988) - are important works, marking the long overdue application of analytical techniques belonging to the period after New Criticism to Christina Rossetti's poetry and prose (4). Before these books, and since the early 1930's, the single sustained piece of critical work presented in this field was Lona Mosk Packer's *Christina Rossetti*, a grossly speculative, biographical-historical piece of criticism, grounded in the supposition of Christina Rossetti's secret adoration of the artist William Bell Scott, a hypothesis since deftly

dismissed as highly improbable in fact by Professor William E. Fredeman (5).

Packer's imperceptions do perhaps serve to illustrate one thing - the fact that, in the words of another critic, Betty S. Flowers, Christina Rossetti's 'poems deserve more than a biographically reductive reading' (6). Antony Harrison is in accord with this evaluation of the fundamental nature of the Rossetti text. He clarifies further the critical position which might best be adopted in an endeavour to extract a more sophisticated reading of the poetry.

One typical thematic mode of [Christina Rossetti's] poetry, then, is intertextual, directing her reader away from the apparently simple surface meanings of her poems and toward historically layered literary statements and traditions, consideration of which complicates, amplifies, and redefines the meanings of her own verse. (7)

Empirically founded, biographical detective work - as Packer's study illustrates - is all too reductive a method of interpretation to apply to poetry which, rather than offering specific documentation of events from history, frequently turns its attention toward the specific literary, artistic and philosophical traditions it functions to extend and rewrite. William Michael Rossetti's picture of his sister as a 'casual and spontaneous' poet (*Works*, lxviii) rightly finds itself more often quoted as a mistaken surmise than an authoritative opinion, especially so since Professor Crump's research began to appear. Antony Harrison has concisely summed up the general feeling on this matter among modern critics of Christina Rossetti.

In his memoir William Michael is... in part transmitting an image of his sister - as a pious and ascetic woman unconcerned with worldly achievements - that she herself had been at some pains to cultivate... This image suppresses half of the truth of Christina Rossetti's values and aspirations. (8)

From available manuscripts, we know Christina Rossetti to have been a scrupulous, detailed reviser of her work. Moreover, her poetry is highly conscious of its status as such, aware of its place in the tradition of which it is a part. Rossetti's writing, as we aim to show, knowingly inhabits that position which T. S. Eliot recognised in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

I [have] tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. (9)

Like all poetry, the text of Christina Rossetti's verses functions in and around the knowledge of literary tradition (whether it embraces, challenges, parodies, subverts or honours that tradition) and is wrought out of a language it does not invent, but inherits along with all its value laden terms. Unlike all poetry, the Rossetti text shows itself conscious of the implications of this function and of the weight of this inheritance. Just how acutely aware is Rossetti of the weight of tradition will become clear when we turn to specific analysis of pieces such as *Monna Innominata* (*Works*, pp. 58-64) later in this thesis. But even her earliest lyrics exhibit a considered assimilation of certain aspects of Romantic thought - though the doctrine is by no means wholly

embraced even at this formative stage of Christina Rossetti's development as a poet. Even William Michael Rossetti is at pains to convey the attentiveness to literary legacy displayed by his 'spontaneous' and 'least bookish' sister.

... indeed she was from first to last much the best of the four [Rossetti children] at all matters of acquired knowledge... plunging with great ardour, before reaching the age of twelve or eleven, into such themes as the career of Napoleon, the Iliad, Grecian mythology, etc... (*Works*, p. xlvii)

As she matured, it seems that Christina Rossetti certainly acquainted herself with the notion of a received literary tradition.

In poetry she was (need I say it?) capable of appreciating whatever is really good; and yet her affections, if not her perceptions, in poetry, were severely restricted. The one poet whom she really gloried in was Dante: next to him perhaps Homer, so far as she could estimate him in one or two English translations... Among very great authors, none (making allowance for Dante) seemed to appeal to her more than Plato: she read his Dialogues with ever renewed or augmented zest. For Shakespear her intellectual reverence was of course very deep... (*Ibid*, p. lxix)

William Michael (himself a writer) shows in his reverentially qualifying (and, it must be said, quite patronising) tone, 'really good... very great authors... of course', the entrenched position the predetermined literary canon occupies in the formation of any new artistic position. Tradition, whether it be accepted as worthy or not, cannot be ignored.

Another great thing which she disliked was Milton's *Paradise Lost*: the only poems of his which she seems to me to have seriously loved

were the sonnets. Among modern English poets, I should say that Shelley, or perhaps Coleridge, stood highest in her esteem; certainly not Wordsworth, whom she read scantily. As to Shelley, she can have known little beyond his lyrics; most of the long poems, as being 'impious', remained unscanned. Tennyson she heartily enjoyed and admired, and Mrs. Browning; and Browning she honoured without eager sympathy. The poems of William Morris were mostly unread by her - not unvalued. Of Swinburne she knew *Atalanta In Calydon*, and some few other things, including (I suppose) *Erechtheus*; and she regarded *Atalanta* as - what it is - a stupendous masterpiece.

(*Ibid*, p.lxx)

The contradictory citations of Shelley in this list of influences are troubling: a poet who 'stood highest in her esteem' is, in the same breath, said to have largely 'remained unscanned'. I would suggest that the whole observation becomes more coherent if the first 'Shelley' is, in fact, a misprint for 'Keats' - who, though a clear influence on Christina Rossetti's writing (and to whom she dedicated one of her earliest pieces (*Works*, p. 291) - is oddly absent from this catalogue of poets supposedly 'in her esteem'. Whatever, I do not include this listing as firm evidence of Christina Rossetti's taste and allegiance in matters of literature. This is not her argument, but her brother's and, anyway, William Michael's 'facts' are notoriously speculative and ought to be regarded with a healthy degree of scepticism as biographical data. But what his loaded presentation of a literary history does illustrate is the burden of tradition, imbued with predetermined opinion and value, inevitably involved in the construction of any fresh literature. 'The poems of William Morris were mostly unread by her - not unvalued'; this is an odd statement. The overreaching implication is that reputation precedes acquaintance with the text - tradition potentially outweighs

evaluation. In a letter sent to William Aytoun, then editor of Blackwood's magazine, in 1854, Christina Rossetti acknowledges this importance, clarifying her own position and demonstrating a considered selectivity in her own assimilation of poetic influence.

I hope that I shall not be misunderstood as guilty
of egotism or foolish vanity, when I say that my love
for what is good in the works of others teaches me
that there is something above the despicable in mine;
that poetry is with me, not a mechanism, but an impulse
and a reality, and that I know my aims in writing
to be pure, and directed to that which is true and
right. (10)

This is an important pronouncement. It forms an admission on the part of the poet that while her creations are to be read in terms of 'the works of others', in other words that poetry is a self-referential mode of discourse, at the same time, creative energies outwith patterns of articulation already predetermined - 'poetry is with me... an impulse' - are recognised as equally fundamental to the generation of poetic discourse by the artist. Tradition is acknowledged as such, but simultaneously identified as something which can be tempered by 'impulse[s]' outwith its jurisdiction. As we shall see in chapters to follow, this willingness to recognise, but not idly to follow poetic conventions (or any received ideological system relied upon for the transmission of those conventions) forms a significant part of the strategy of the text of Christina Rossetti's writing.

In this fashion, even Christina Rossetti's earliest poems may be read as calculated attempts actively to explore her own assimilation of certain

specific literary traditions. Complacent acceptance of tradition is avoided through the objective, but self-conscious scrutiny of poetic nuance and convention. As I have said, this feature of Rossetti's work is characterised by an intellectual energy manifest in a retreat from action toward a life constructed around speculative investigations of religious and artistic discourse. Christina Rossetti's poetry is necessarily the work of a female poet inheriting and writing within a tradition of verse defined by male values, a tradition which has held woman to be the 'other' in a version of experience orientated from the perspective of a dominant male-ordered subjectivity. This fact alone places her work as already at odds with the broad tradition from which her poetry sprang. This sense of exile, being outside poetry looking in, and exclusion - overtly addressed in longer, later works such as *The Prince's Progress* - is already present in Christina Rossetti's early lyrics. However, and notably, at this stage, it is framed in terms which show a concern to embrace certain aspects of Romanticism and pre-Victorian address, rather than defiantly to abnegate the import of male-ordered poetry *per se*, as *Monna Innominata* attempted to do later in Rossetti's career. Her early writing shows that Rossetti felt a warm affinity with particular areas of experience as related in the poetry, particularly that of the Romantics, with which she had been in contact since a child.

On St. Agnes' Eve, 1849, the then eighteen year old Christina wrote a eulogistic sonnet to Romantic belief entitled 'On Keats' (*Works*, p. 291). Though far from pastiche, the poem immediately shows itself at one with the typically Romantic idiom;

A garden in a garden: a green spot
Where all is green: most fitting slumber-place
For the strong man grown weary of a race
Soon over. Unto him a goodly lot
Hath fallen in fertile ground; there thorns are not,
But his own daisies; silence, full of grace,
Surely hath shed a quiet on his face...
His name, in every humble heart that sings,
Shall be a fountain of love, verily.

Superficially an elegy to the dead poet, whose perennial appeal is imaged in terms of the fecund, evergreen setting of his grave, 'On Keats' casts together with earthly mutability the notion of artistic (and pious, admitted in the pseudo-sermonising tone) permanence. For this reason alone - the juxtaposition of Romantic and Christian transcendent values - 'On Keats' assumes an energy, and a puzzling denouement, which takes effect beyond the surface literal level. The 'His' of the concluding couplet could arguably invoke the divinity, or Keats, or both. The poem also marks the first recorded appearance in Rossetti's verse of the oft-to-be-repeated 'garden' image (narrowly beating its inclusion in the second part of 'Three Stages' (*Works* pp. 288-90), written four months later, where the speaker wants to 'Dig up the pleasure-gardens of my soul'). The image is a commonplace, but Rossetti's particular placing of it with regard to Keats and the notion of earthly mutability, and her repeated use of the idea in her early lyrics, is a clue to her initial attempts to locate herself around poetic tradition. Here is the image again.

The door was shut. I looked between
Its iron bars; and saw it lie,
My garden, mine, beneath the sky,
Pied with all flowers bedewed and green.

From bough to bough the song-birds crossed,

From flower to flower the moths and bees:
With all its nests and stately trees
It had been mine, and it was lost.

(*Works*, pp. 320-1))

These are the opening two stanzas of the 1856 poem, the tellingly titled 'Shut Out', which maintains the 'garden' image and again frames it in terms familiar from Romantic writing. To be 'Shut Out' implies a division, a separation, forcing a partial sphere from that which previously was whole. The speaker occupies a point of exile from that which she considers to be her right and natural domain. There are direct echoes here of Wordsworth and Coleridge's reinstatement of a tradition going back to Milton's sonnet 'How Soon Hath Time' - one of a group of poems Christina was said to have 'seriously loved' (*Works* p. lxx). Milton's poem expresses distress at his seeming poetic sterility in language coincident with that we see employed by Rossetti in 'Shut Out' and, indeed, repeated in many of her early poems. 'But my late spring no bud nor blossom showeth', admits Milton's disillusioned speaker (11), and Rossetti's poem echoes 'Let me have/Some buds to cheer my outcast state' (the same image is offered in *Later Life* - 'Still here a bud and there a blossom seem/Hopeful' - see this chapter, p. 26). Christina Rossetti makes use of similar symbolism in piece of the same period, the (once more) appropriately titled 1857 poem 'Introspective' (*Works*, p. 331), which again offers a lapsed-pastoral vision of the seemingly spent creative self;

On my boughs neither leaf nor fruit,
No sap in my uttermost root,
Brooding in an anguish almost dumb
On the short past and the long to-come.

Often in Rossetti, regret over this lack of natural fecundity is explicitly linked with the lost Eden ideal, another literary convention, as in the 1855 lyric 'An After-Thought' (*Works*, pp. 318-9);

Oh lost garden Paradise! -
Were the roses redder there
Than they blossom elsewhere?

Here, directly Miltonic (though we are informed that Christina 'disliked... Milton's *Paradise Lost*' (*Works*, p. lxx), possibly for its anti-female implications?) and scriptural imagery is preferred as a means of conveying the speaker's strain at her exile from a once innocent state. But just as often the natural world is cast as an absent goal in non-pious terms - a luxuriant metaphorical conceit against which the speaker's oppositional sense of harnessed, inner torment may be measured. Linked to the 'garden' device, this image of the imprisoned spirit is pervasive in Rossetti's poetry of the 1850s, epitomised in the almost nihilistic 'Day-Dreams' (*Works*, pp. 332-3) where the speaker is so conscious of her incarcerated, exhausted soul that she attempts by measures to remove herself from its stultifyingly 'Deaf' influence. In 'Shut Out', the archetypal lost 'garden' from which the spirit of the poet is excluded, self-consciously replays the Wordsworthian tradition of alienated youth. In 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', the standard is artfully set by Wordsworth with the speaker's wistful admission that the 'things I have seen I now can see no more' and the ensuing relation of those 'things' in images from Nature. Midway through the 'Ode' comes the beautifully poignant, ominous observation;

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy... (12)

'Shut Out' is clearly a similar expression of the sense of powerful impulses frustrated which relies, in part, for its impact upon a resurrection of pre-Romantic and Romantic notions of the fractured self and its transfiguration into natural images. So, beyond the surface level of dramatic relation of suffering, Rossetti's symbols also function on a literal-historically intertextual plane. Rossetti's speaker identifies herself with Romantic notions of relinquished creativity, using images and symbols directly inherited from Romanticism to do so. This place of Romantic 'song-birds', hence of poetic articulation, is an Eden-like environment, innocent and free, from which the speaker, through no fault of her own, is now banished. The poem exerts a desire to reinhabit this unspoiled territory (in doing so, inhabiting a *poetic* territory decidedly traditional in form), but is prevented from doing so by a deathly figure, imposing and prosaically described.

A shadowless spirit kept the gate,
Blank and unchanging like the grave.
I, peering through, said; 'Let me have
Some buds to cheer my outcast state.'

He answered not. 'Or give me, then,
But one small twig from shrub or tree;
And bid my home remember me
Until I come to it again.'

The spirit was silent; but he took
Mortar and stone to build a wall;
He left no loophole great or small
Through which my straining eyes might look.

'Shades of the prison-house' are closing on the growing poetic girl - not just by reasons of encroaching age, but by reason of her sex and the socially enforced repression of woman in the nineteenth century; notably, the original title of 'Shut Out' was to be the personalised, appropriative 'What happened to Me', rightly regarded as 'too significant' by William Michael (*Works*, p. 480). At this point in her development as a female poet, Rossetti turns gladly to the Romantic poets she enjoyed reading and borrows their lexical and symbolic structures to use as an expressive means of ordering her own feelings and youthful identity. In the Romantic tones of disquiet at one's place in the world, and uncertainty as to one's (artistic) future, Rossetti recognises a sympathetic voice and, understandably, adopts it as her own. The wistful, questioning discourse of Romantics, such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, latterly unsure as to the permanence they had sought to establish in their verse becomes the platform from which Christina Rossetti begins her own quest for the construction of female identity. Conventional Romantic idiom is inhabited in a seemingly comfortable manner, and is found appropriate to convey, ironically, a sense of dissatisfaction with one's current means towards self-definition.

My trees are not in flower,
I have no bower,
And gusty creaks my tower,
And lonesome, very lonesome, is my strand. (*Works*, p. 338)

This concluding quatrain from the 1858 poem, 'Autumn' (*Works*, pp. 337-8), at once shows itself, like 'Shut Out', content to re-verbalise Romantic notions of alienation but, again, compresses the images together so that

they themselves appear to stifle and imprison the desire for true expression. At this stage in her poetic career, Christina Rossetti uses Romantic poetics in a positive manner to make statements, themselves made by Romantic poets, hinting at the dissatisfaction with the channels of expression open to a female poet which would be more fully and radically explored in her later poetry. Utilising the same unusual verse form as Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1851), thereby marking empathy for Tennyson's own articulations of loss and doubt, 'Shut Out' ends with its speaker's despair at being unable to achieve free expression, acutely aware of the partial nature of the song's import, of the sense of isolation from a unified, idyllic principle.

So now I sit here quite alone,
Blinded with tears; nor grieve for that,
For nought is left worth looking at
Since my delightful land is gone.

A violet bed is budding near,
Wherein a lark has made her nest;
And good they are, but not the best;
And dear they are, but not so dear.

This despair is nothing new, and neither is the language in which it is framed. 'And good they are, but not the best...' echoes another of Rossetti's favourite poets, Coleridge, and his sentiments in the 'Dejection Ode';

I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast? (13)

The carefully ordered sentiments of Rossetti's lyric simultaneously recall Shakespeare's 'Sonnet LXXIII' and its image of 'Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang' (14), and, perhaps, the whole narrative of 'Shut Out' has a foundation in Blake's mournful lyric, 'The Garden of Love'. Without doubt, Christina Rossetti would have read this through Dante Gabriel's ownership of what is now known as the Rossetti Manuscript - a Notebook of Blake's writing between 1791-2. The Notebook (now priceless) was purchased from the British Museum by Dante Gabriel in April 1947 for ten shillings (which he borrowed from William Michael), and was still in his possession when he died on April 9th 1882. In the 1860s, Dante Gabriel was in the process of publishing an edition of the poems contained in the Notebook, but this project never came to fruition (15). 'The Garden of Love' is the fifth poem in the Rossetti Manuscript;

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play upon the green.

And the gates of this chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore,

And I saw that it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where the flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires. (16)

Blake's Garden becomes 'filled with graves' attended by the sinister 'Priests'; Rossetti's sinister 'shadowless spirit' attends her 'garden' and is 'unchanging like the grave'. In Blake's poem 'the gates... were shut';

in Rossetti's lyric 'The door was shut'. Though Rossetti's work eschews the direct tone of anti-clericism prominent in 'The Garden of Love', the dramatic narrative of 'Shut Out' firmly recalls that of Blake's poem, and the quatrain patterning is also coincident. Far from rejecting the 'male' tradition of poetry (as we shall witness Rossetti at pains to do in her later work) here, Christina Rossetti actively and finely exploits it, so acknowledging the continuity of her song - a position we shall see revised considerably by the time of *Monna Innominata*.

There are two points to be taken from a reading of 'Shut Out', and the many similar pieces among Christina Rossetti's early poetic productions, which display the conscious assimilation of these predominantly Romantic formative inputs. The first is that, at this stage, Christina Rossetti's reading has lead her into a kind of poetry which draws considerably upon her acknowledged admiration for poetic tradition as bequeathed by male writers. This position would later be modified in varying degrees through *Goblin Market* to *Monna Innominata*, as Rossetti's subsequent poetic development brought with it revisions in her attitude to literary tradition. What begins as an adopted, soon becomes an *adapted* influence. The second point to be stressed is that Rossetti openly invokes the male Romantic poets at this juncture in her career to re-articulate their confessions of alienation, she finding her own artistic articulation stifled and inspiration lacking. Christina Rossetti reinvests the Romantic agony with the drama of her own particular predicament as a woman writer in a man's world, currently content to inhabit a masculine poetic form but soon to become infused with the desire to overcome formal constraints. 'Shut Out' is given an additional, particularised poignancy by fact of its author's sex, and at the level of personal

distress the images of relinquished flowers and buds - 'good they are, but not the best' - are expressive of a sense of sterility and repression linked to Victorian womanhood. Victorian novels - those of the Brontës and, in Dickens, through figures like Esther Summerson and Little Dorrit - had articulated this image of the patient but distressed, repressed female self. Male poets had also been free to handle the topic of female eroticism and its expression, notably in Keats' 'Eve of St. Agnes', Coleridge's 'Christabel' and Blake's 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' - but not woman poets. 'Shut Out' ventures into this area, as later *Goblin Market* is to do. At this stage in her general development as a poet, Rossetti is prepared to embrace the male poetic tradition at a level of her own womanly desires, pain and stress. Where the male poet has been sensitive and perceptive, his vision will be thus far assimilated into Rossetti's own, though the crasser elements of male (im)perception are seen as open to rejection or drastic revision. In this sense, Christina Rossetti's earliest poetry may be seen to anticipate her later work, but can in no sense be viewed as a radical reworking of a male tradition of writing. That directive would arrive explicitly in *Monna Innominata*, by way of *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress*, in which poems, as we shall see, Rossetti progressively grows to realise her position as a woman-poet, both sharing and not sharing with her male poetic predecessors.

III

One register, then, which substantially affects and colours the intertextual framework constructed by Rossetti's poetry is that arising from her inheritance of certain poetic doctrines purveyed by the Romantics. It is worthwhile, at this point, spending time clarifying Rossetti's position in this respect. As to the revision of Romantic ideology undertaken in Christina Rossetti's writing, the devotional aspect of her intertextual approach to poetry, arising from her background of Anglican Christian beliefs, is also highly important. (The attitude taken towards piety, and its abrupt modification in the later poetry and prose, is examined at length in the final chapter of this thesis, but it is instructive to outline Rossetti's general approach at this juncture.) A collision of ideologies - between the essential quality allocated to nature and the human imagination by Romanticism, and the subjugation of both of these to divine omnipotence demanded by Christian dogma - may be witnessed in Christina Rossetti's work. This markedly conditions many responses within the poetry and carries implications concerning first the redirecting of Romantic ideals and, second, the simultaneous commentary on religious iconography and doctrine enacted by the text. The Romantics aspired towards communion with nature as the ultimate goal with which human imaginative capabilities could be rewarded. Coordination with nature on a successful, reciprocal basis for the individual and, organically, for society is seen as a necessary prerequisite by the Romantics in their endeavours to sustain faith in the primacy of human constructiveness. Wordsworth himself began by

elevating this position but, in *The Excursion*, moved towards a form of Christian orthodoxy. Devotional codes, such as that inherited by Christina Rossetti from her vigorous Biblical studies, also promote the human imagination, but as a gift from a God who is a greater universal essence of those particular instances which He has bestowed upon earth. Similarly, from a Christian standpoint nature is significant not as an infinite end, but as a revelation, a concrete manifestation of a divine, ethereal presence. Catherine Cantalupo, distinguishing between this Romantic 'immanence' and Christian 'transcendence', remarks upon Christina Rossetti's perception of the ambiguity;

Believing that [a] single flower was a type...
of God's love, Rossetti could not accept the
implication of some Romantic poetry that God
was, for example, in the tree rather than the
tree's maker. (17)

The pre-eminence afforded to human imagination and the world of nature by conventionally expounded Romantic ideology is challenged, as it had been by certain quarters of late Romantic thought, as an absolute ideal in the poetry of Christina Rossetti. The sequence (unfortunately undated as to composition) of twenty eight sonnets titled *Later Life* (*Works*, pp. 73-82) may be read as illustrative of Rossetti's ambivalent opinion in this area (18). The cycle begins with a direct, unambiguous declaration of divine permanence and omnipotence.

Before the mountains were brought forth, before
Earth and the world were made, then God was God:
And God will still be God when flames shall roar
Round earth and heaven dissolving at His nod... (I, 1-4)

God is conceived of as the origin of all else in the ontological system the poem begins to construct. God made the 'mountains', symbolising nature, and so nature is seen, not as an absolute, but as a reflection of divine power. God is given as the principle of intelligibility, a centre, guarantee of meaning: 'God was God' and 'God will still be God', in other words the system of signification generated within this devotional sonnet is one with certainty of reference. But - typical of the Rossetti poem - this complacency is set up as such only rapidly to be analysed and questioned in terms of its implications. Having established this stable, devotional frame of reference, the text immediately steps outside its jurisdiction and offers criticism of the certitudes it implies, presenting religious security as a wholly ambiguous prospect. The absolute certainty of reference promoted by the opening sonnet implies a closed system. That the sequence continues at all (for another twenty seven stanzas) represents a rejection of that sterile closure: anxiety is felt in the text as activity, as opposed to redundant certitudes, begins to set itself against the devotional dogma.

Let us to-day while it is called to-day
Set out, if utmost speed may yet avail -
The shadows lengthen and the light grows pale:
For who through darkness and the shadow of death,
Darkness that may be felt, shall find a way,
Blind-eyed, deaf-eared, and choked with failing breath.
(II, 9-14)

Lyte - Abide

?

Again in the spirit of the poems of faith and doubt of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, this disturbing and compelling image proceeds from a desire to circumvent, or escape the stifling clutches of a closed pattern of signification. The text desires, with 'utmost speed', to set itself apart

from an atmosphere of self-satisfying 'to-day while it is called to-day' reference. Such a system, in its dogmatic certitude, completely stifles all possibility of articulation, leaving the text 'Blind-eyed, deaf-eared, and choked with failing breath'. The cycle continues its deconstruction of the devotional epistemological framework it initially promoted, in places - 'If making makes us Thine then Thine we are' - adopting sarcasm as a manner of reproach toward the closed referential process it is moving (literally as the poem proceeds, and philosophically) away from. By the mid-point of the sonnet sequence, its formal centre, the notion of a 'centre' has been wholly rejected. Unity is shown to be a relative, not an absolute ideal.

Our teachers teach that one and one make two:
Later, Love rules that one and one make one:
Abstruse the problems! neither need we shun,
But skillfully to each should yield its due...
Both provable by me, and both by you. (XVI, 1-8)

Indeed, there is a tone of pleasure pervasive here, as the text celebrates its achievement of an exchange - those redundant certitudes, the notion of closure inherent in the dialectics of the opening sonnet, have given way to open-ended semantic activity.

Befogged and witless, in a wordy maze
A groping stroll perhaps may do us good;
If cloyed we are with much we have understood...
(XVI, 9-11)

This emphatic desire to dislodge the mechanics of a signficatory system built upon certitude and closure must be accompanied by a total decentering process, a rejection of traditional principles of reference.

I am sick of where I am and where I am not,
I am sick of foresight and of memory,
I am sick of all I have and all I see,
I am sick of self, and there is nothing new;
O weary impatient patience of my lot!... (XVII, 9-12)

These repeated rejections of potential stability mark something of a turning point in the *Later Life* sequence. The antithetical juxtaposition 'impatient patience' - two oppositional signifiers made to relate directly to one another - represents a complete usurpation of the closed, self-congratulatory system of signification offered earlier in the sonnet cycle from a conventional devotional position. Stability, certainty of reference, has been demolished by the text: reconstruction is now attempted, heralded by a turning towards a new frame of reference. With God displaced as a principle of intelligibility, the text looks now to nature.

A *manner* of reconstruction begins: for the poem to continue, it must. It appears that the natural may world offer a potential way forward from out of the 'wordy maze' with no fixed centre which the text has articulated. A 'Winter' lanscape is envisaged 'not so drear as was my boding dream', to ensure that the text itself does not become frozen by its own lack of centering principle.

Still here a bud and there a blossom seem
Hopeful, and robin still is musical.

Leaves, flowers, and fruit, and one delightful song,
Remain; (XIX, 7-10)

The isolation of 'Remain', achieved by caesural stopping and the accumulation of qualifying subjects in the preceeding line, reinforces the aspect of endurance and permanence which the text has allocated to nature at this point, the beginning of the quest for a new mode of articulation. It is not coincidental that the natural images are closely associated here with 'musical' notions of 'delightful song' as the cycle begins to find a new voice. Neither is it coincidental that the text turns its attention directly away from the idea of the 'robin' and the 'hundred solitary birds [which] salute the day' to rest its emphasis upon one particular bird from nature - the nightingale.

One solitary bird salutes the night:
Its mellow grieving wiles our grief away,
And tunes our weary watches to delight;
It seems to think the thoughts we cannot say,
To know and sing them, and to set them right;
Until we feel once more that May is May,
And hope some buds may bloom without a blight.
(XX, 2-8)

The new mode of articulation which the poem is striving to adopt is associated with (indeed conceived of in direct terms of) the song of the nightingale - an important image in Romantic poetry, conveying not firm belief and confidence in Romanticism unqualified, but in fact a note of scepticism, the Romantic agony. In his *Defence Of Poetry*, Shelley likens the poet to this bird.

A Poet is a nightingale, who sits in
darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude
with sweet sounds... (19)

This beautiful image carries with it the sense of loss which infuses some Romantic texts, a step down from a high Romantic dogma, springing from doubts that the imagination may not be, as Wordsworth terms it in *The Prelude*, an 'absolute strength', guaranteeing communion with 'the eternal, the infinite, and the one' referred to by Shelley in the *Defence Of Poetry* (20). The nightingale, immortalised as symbol in Keats' 'Ode' (and ingeniously remanaged in Yeats' 'Sailing To Byzantium'), presents an ambivalent image of potentially distressing isolation. In restating this image, Rossetti shows herself allied to the scepticism already urged by some Romantic texts towards the Romantic belief in the existence of a vital relationship between the individual poetic imagination and a broader realm of existence in the world of exteriors. In *Later life*, Christina Rossetti's use of the nightingale as a particular at this point implies scepticism towards this relationship. The text goes on to study this relationship, making this study a direct response to its own recent destabilising process; the basis of the new search for a principle of intelligibility becomes the realisation that a stable principle will not be forthcoming. The sequence begins to employ the codes familiar to Romantic poetry.

A host of things I take on trust: I take
The nightingales on trust, for few and far
Between those actual summer moments are
When I have heard what melody they make.
(XXI, 1-4)

Conveying scepticism toward what many Victorian commentators dogmatically regarded as Romantic unities, this nightingale image prefaces a direct commentary upon a high Romantic notion - that of

Wordsworth's often ambiguously presented 'spots of time'. A sceptical stance is adopted by the text 'on trust' towards the Wordsworthian 'summer moments' of intensity and communion with the natural world. The sonnet continues, inhabiting a Wordsworthian discourse but simultaneously deconstructing its generated platitudes. In doing so, Christina Rossetti shows herself aware of the pitfalls in the reading of Wordsworth as prophet and sage, which ignores what we now see as areas of questioning - it is these areas with which Rossetti wishes to empathise. The 'boy and boat' episode of Wordsworth's *Prelude* is addressed and its inherent uncertainties, overlooked by many nineteenth century champions of Romantic belief, are brought into the foreground in Rossetti's re-reading.

So chanced it once at Como on the Lake:
But all things, then, waxed musical; each star
Sang on its course, each breeze sang on its car,
All harmonies sang to senses wide awake.
All things in tune, myself not out of tune...

(XXI, 5-9)

The poetry here is informed with what appears to be a standard expression of the conjunction achieved in archetypal modes of Romantic poetry, between the innermost self and the natural world of exteriors. But the lines which follow are more of a sceptical commentary upon this platitude than an affirmation of its status. The Romantic, ultimate attachment of self and surrounding exteriors is suffixed by a tone of calculated detachment.

Those nightingales were nightingales indeed:
Yet truly an owl had satisfied my need,
And wrought a rapture underneath that moon,

Or simple sparrow chirping from a reed;
For June that night glowed like a doubled June.
(XXI, 10-14)

Later Life here reminds one of Wordsworth's own doubts as to Romantic stability and certitude as to subjectivity, recasting that objection around a sarcastic reminder of the redundant nature of closed signifying systems - the nightingales 'were nightingales indeed' and June similarly satisfies and justifies itself as 'like a doubled June'. Aware of the stagnation which such a manner of conjunction can imply (which has already been illustrated in the very first sonnet of the sequence) the language here cunningly mocks post-Romantic, popular Victorian enthusiasms concerning the stable subject. If the object world has been assimilated into the subject sphere, the problem of the object is not solved - just placed within a different frame of reference. Representationalism is exchanged for idealism, but the subject/object relation still pertains. Having established stable subjectivity and absolute communion with the natural world (doing away with the subject/object relationship by assimilating the two), Rossetti's poem immediately attacks this complacent pose by ridiculing its implications. If the problem of the object is no more, then what does it matter which object we settle upon? Anything will signify, given Rossetti's desire here emphatically to inhabit the ambivalent margins of a (Romantically inspired) position which once held stability to be an achievable end.

Yet truly an owl had satisfied my need,
And wrought a rapture underneath that moon,
Or simple sparrow, chirping from a reed...
(XXI, 11-13)

Later Life makes provocative judgements about systems of signification and, notably, by insinuating an ambivalent interplay between Christian and Romantic ideologies, rejects any notion of a stable subjectivity. In this respect, the text of the poetry, taking signification and articulation as its topics of discussion, becomes self-referential, its own subject. The rejection of dogmatic readings of Romanticism is emphasised by sonnet XXII, which again adopts a Wordsworthian register only to collapse its arguments from within. The famous Alpine scenes of Book Six of *The Prelude* are gently and perceptively invoked here;

The mountains in their overwhelming might
Moved me to sadness when I saw them first,
And afterwards they moved me to delight;
Struck harmonies from silent chords which burst
Out into song, a song by memory nursed...
(XXII, 1-5)

The contradiction within the image arrives in a similar manner to that accomplished in the preceeding sonnet, simultaneously recalling Wordsworth's own ambivalence in *The Prelude*

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light -
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face...' (21)

In Rossetti's sonnet, the 'pleasure and... wonder' of this spiritual communion are reduced and crystallised into one, obvious object image, the 'forget-me-not' flower. But, swiftly begs the text, what power of reference can this image have if the subject/object gap is closed in blissful concordance? If signification is closed in blissful certainty of

reference what place is left for a 'crown'-ing, metaphoric enhancement of the text?

Yet why should such a flower choose such a spot?
Could we forget that way which once we went
Though not one flower had bloomed to weave its crown.
(XXII, 12-14)

Through establishing an affinity, in the language of her earliest lyrics, with those areas of scepticism and fear of mutability present in Wordsworth and Coleridge, Rossetti has come, by this point, to confront Romanticism, as her finest poetry confronts any ideological stance, with its inherent, formative inconsistencies. The poetry once more actively deconstructs the premises from which it seems to proceed. Notions of stability are dislodged and replaced by a regard for fragmentation, disunity, and, finally, relativity. The reading of the Romantic assertion as stable subjectivity is upsetting to Rossetti as a woman writer and is thus cancelled in favour of the later, ambivalent presentation of selfhood, resulting in a formulation of the self as divided and unstable. Duality abounds - 'we consider what this life we lead / Is not, and is...' (XXV, 1-2) - and the irrational is promoted to a level coincident with the rational (the further implications of this important theme in Rossetti's work will be discussed in the next chapter). The unconscious is recognised as a site of meaning, and this identification colours further the rewriting of Romantic values one finds in Rossetti's poetry. Catherine Belsey points out the implications of this attention to the unconscious side of the self when she speaks of

the notion of a unitary and autonomous subject,

ultimate origin of its own choices. The existence of the unconscious puts this notion into question. (22)

Acute consciousness of self is a pervasive theme in all of Christina Rossetti's writing.

All my walls are lost in mirrors, whereupon I trace
Self to right hand, self to left hand, self in every place,
Self-same solitary figure, self-same seeking face.
(*Works*, p. 35)

The idea of the self as inextricably divided, implicit in Romantic writings such as those we witnessed earlier influencing Rossetti's 'Shut Out', and the strain felt due to this division, is prevalent in poems such as the aforementioned 'Day Dreams' (*Works*, pp. 332-3), with its attention to the imprisoned, autonomous 'soul'.

Gazing through her chamber window
Sits my soul's dear soul:
Looking northward, looking southward,
Looking to the goal,
Looking back without control...

The unconscious, 'my soul's dear soul', is envisaged as 'without control', that is to say a site of production of meaning which forms itself around no fixed centering principle, a measure of the irrational. Again, this offers a modifying aspect to the Romantic ideals Christina Rossetti, as a Victorian poet, inherited. Imagination itself is, thus, revalued in the Rossetti text.

In a prose work of 1883, *Letter And Spirit*, one can detect, from the creative artist's standpoint, some dissatisfaction with the degree of primacy allocated to imagination, albeit coupled with admission of imagination's importance. At one point, Christina Rossetti proposes the following argument.

To modify by a boundless license of imagination
the Voice of Revelation, or of tradition, or our
own perceptions, concerning the universe, its Ruler,
features, origin, destinies, falls within the range
of human faculties. (23)

Imagination is conceived of here, in a Coleridgean fashion, as a power with 'a boundless license' and yet, in the same breath, is allocated boundaries. It is reliant upon 'our own perceptions' which, in turn, are drawn from a 'universe' having a controlling 'Ruler'. Perception is vouched for as 'other' to imagination and these two exist exterior to a 'Ruler' beyond. But the admission that imagination can 'modify by a boundless licence' the data received by means of these other epistemological sites does in fact guarantee imagination the primary status which the devotional aspect of Rossetti's argument is elsewhere at pains to revoke.

For if (as I have seen pointed out) God is not
to be called like His creature, whose grace is
simply typical, but that creature is like Him because
expressive of His archetypal Attribute, it suggests
itself that for every aspect of creation there must
exist the corresponding Divine attribute. (24)

There is an awkward tone of hollow self-justification about these statements - 'as I have seen pointed out... it suggests itself...' - which undermines the resolution of these statements. The speaker is involved in a blinkered attempt at convincing herself of the validity of the pious dogma she regurgitates (the development of this tone in Rossetti's writing is discussed in Chapter 6 of this study). The semi-pantheistic conception of nature and the Platonic view of 'the inadequacy of ought temporal to shadow forth that which is eternal' are clearly at odds with the aesthetic of Romanticism, but this thesis sits uncomfortably with the reverence for human imagination as an essentially 'boundless' concept which the text displays. An ontological system of existence is generated, and the element which deconstructs that system, necessary to its formation and yet simultaneously outside its parameters, is imagination. Rossetti negates the stable concept of subjectivity promoted by insensitive contemporary interpretations of the Romantics and heralds a re-reading of Nature and Imagination, thus a re-reading of the nature of reading (total perception) itself. Cantalupo is correct when she declares Christina Rossetti to be 'ambivalent about the Romantic view of nature'.

Clearly she inherits the Romantic concern with epistemology; she wonders: "How do subject and object meet in a meaningful relationship? By what means do we have a significant awareness of the world?" Consequently, Rossetti sometimes records the process of reading nature as well as the content of that reading, valuing the flux of her experience of nature, with its misrepresentations as well as its insights... (25)

This is a crucial point. Christina Rossetti's poetry extends inherent Romantic ambivalence and forms an intertextual investigation of the premises upon which so called 'certitudes' are founded. It forever shuns absolutes in favour of relative concepts, always aware, as a stanza from 'An Old World Thicket' (*Works*, pp. 64-8) neatly summarises, that to posit one system of 'truth' is to acknowledge all opposing alternative 'other' possible truths.

For all that was but showed what all was not,
But gave clear proof of what might never be;
Making more destitute my poverty,
And yet more blank my lot,
And me much sadder by its jubilee.

Presence, in the Rossetti text, denotes absence; it is through absence that presence is often conveyed. The sadness left behind by a departed love, memory of time gone by, silence that speaks volumes, echoes, last thoughts of one now dead - always the reminder that being carries the possibility of not being, desire implies lack. Certainty relies upon the potential of uncertainty and thus is neatly deconstructed.

We lack, yet cannot fix upon the lack:
Not this, nor that; yet somewhat, certainly.
We see the things we do not yearn to see
Around us: and what see we glancing back?
Lost hopes that leave our hearts upon the rack,
Hopes that were never ours yet seemed to be...
(VI, 1-6)

This compelling series of propositions and negations forms the beginning to another sonnet in the *Later Life* double sequence. It constitutes one of the strongest, most concentrated examples, plainly

articulated in straightforward etymology, of the collapsing of certitude in Rossetti's verse. From the very outset, the text is wholly unable to 'fix upon' the concept, 'lack', which forms its fundamental, prime premise, 'We lack'. Grammatical certainty is simultaneously nudged as the verb becomes a noun uncomprehended within the single line. The second line, with its deliciously ironic final placing of 'certainly' does nothing to assuage the quandary of its predecessor, awkwardly stringing together a staccato succession of partial significations. Perception, given as sight ('We see' in line three), is also partially realised and leaves desire, with its implication of the lack still to the fore, unfulfilled - 'We see the things we do not yearn to see' and, by association, 'We do not see the thing we yearn to see' comes the echo. And the second attempt at perception is twice as unsuccessful as the first: we see 'Lost hopes' that never 'were' but only 'seemed', leaving 'our hearts upon the rack' still, the desire which forms the poem is ever unfulfilled. Kathleen Blake has observed how, in the poetry of Christina Rossetti, hope is often 'hope deferred' - a hope which is not yet allowed into being, thus, as presently defined, not hope at all (26). Here we look vainly for 'Lost hopes' throughout a sonnet which leaves us

Straining dim eyes to catch the invisible sight,
And strong to bear ourselves in patient pain?
(VI, 13-4)

It is a question unresolved in terms of the particular sonnet or indeed (as we have seen) of the sequence as a whole. *Later Life*, like all Rossetti's best poems, gives no single answers, since its whole strategy has revolved around denying the possibility of certitudes.

In Christina Rossetti's writing, then, we may observe a conscious scrutiny of the notion of certainty. This marks a considered rejection of the stable subjectivity which some Romantic poetry had appeared to offer as a legacy to the Victorian writer and a marked alliance with areas of scepticism inherent in Romantic writing itself as to that stability. The vital union between language and figure, the distinguishing feature of fully realised Romantic poetry, had successfully constituted a transcendent principle of order compensating for the collapse of natural and historical continuity which plagued the human spirit in the eighteenth century. A poem no longer evoked a pattern outside itself but constituted that pattern from within itself - the world constructed became inseparable from the poetic activity which constructed it. Imagination assumed a redemptive role, the creative act generating an order inherent within its workings, no longer mimetic of an order outside itself but symbolically constituting that order through union of subject and object, letter and spirit. Hitherto incompatible orders of reality were fused in a spiritual celebration which language could constitute and form. Bloom and Frye have both analysed the 'internalisation' this way of writing discloses, and the programme of spiritual decline and recovery which it began to instil in texts of the Romantic period. The projection, symbolically funded, of the internal landscape of the psyche onto that of the external world fused the two realms together in a subject/object unity of sense. Meaning could be generated from the ordering principle of this new stable subjectivity: epistemology was vouchsafed by a newfound manner of certitude. The second generation Romantics (Shelley in particular) had already exhibited a notable degree of anxiety toward this confidence in the

absolute strength of the imagination - the apocalyptic despair of 'Alastor' and the solipsistic unquiet of the *Defence Of Poetry*. Christina Rossetti's early lyrics, in a manner becoming increasingly impatient in sustained pieces like *Later Life*, forms a continuity between Romantic ambivalence and Victorian doubt. Initially appropriating areas of Romantic expression and latterly emphasising the inconsistencies and doubt already inherent in those areas through her own discomfort with complacency, the poetry of Christina Rossetti discloses a scepticism towards any manner of surety and a self-conscious concern with the relationship of subject to object and with the very nature of 'reality'. On one level, the easily dogmatised Romantic assertion of stable subjectivity, fusion of subject and object brought about by communion of inner and outer, might be read as an attempt at abolition of the problem of the object world. The object is overcome as 'other' by deft relocation within subjectivity and inner consciousness: rather than annihilating the issue, this manipulation simply presents the Victorian poetic text with the task of redefining the subject/object relationship from within a new framework. In attempting to abolish the problem object, Romanticism only succeeded in suppressing it inside a fresh epistemological system, to this degree summoning later scepticism in poets such as Wordsworth towards such a reductive procedure. The whole nature of reality, not simply the status of one element (the object) within that version of existence, had been qualified by what critics held to be the initial Romantic assertion of stable subjectivity and the battlefield for late eighteenth century commentators (and those of today) which that area became. Idealism, based on a fundamental unity of the perceiving mind, had in fact been urged by the Romantics as a new epistemological

standpoint. Many Victorians took this idealism to task not as a model of basic subjectivity (as it had been offered to them) which had drawn the external object world under its internal wing, but as a model of total perception and, therefore still very much involving the subject/object relationship as an essential formative element. Isobel Armstrong tidily summarises a concern which I believe to be a fundamental element of the poetic strategy of the text of Christina Rossetti's writing.

Criticism of nineteenth-century poetry often presupposes a transcendent account of the subject, in which the unity of subject and object is achieved, and in which the relationship between consciousness and the world is mystified, through the personalising and subjectivising of the free autonomous self and its agency. A study of the language of nineteenth-century poetry suggests rather that it works to de-mystify the relation between subject and object, and does not assume a primal unity on the part of the receiving mind. Indeed, it struggles with the problem of relationship itself. (27)

This, then, is essentially the hypothesis from which my reading of the Rossetti text proceeds, as an investigation of 'the problem of relationship itself'. It is a problem addressed, as we shall see, in an intertextual manner which calls into question literary-historical tradition, issues of gender-bias and sexuality and, behind all these, matters of faith and belief. One of the areas in which notions of stability, instability and 'relationship itself' are tackled in the Rossetti canon, again in a manner acknowledging areas of Romantic speculation and ambivalence, is that poetry dealing with dreams and dreaming, where we may witness the subtle but complex use of language

prefiguring in effect the strategies evinced in the longer poems to be examined later in this thesis.

NOTES

- 1) Rossetti, William Michael, ed., *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti* (London; Brown, Langham and Co., 1908) p. 220
- 2) Carlyle, Thomas, *Past and Present* (London; Centenary Edition, 1897) Bk. IV, ch. 3, p. 267
- 3) Crump, R. W., *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti* (Baton Rouge; Louisiana University Press, 1979-) 2 vols. to date
- 4) see Kent, David A., ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* (Ithaca; Cornell, 1987) and Harrison, Antony H., *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Sussex; Harvester, 1988)
- 5) see Packer, L. M., *Christina Rossetti* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1963) and Fredeman, 'Review' of Packer's work in *Victorian Studies* VIII, (Sept. 1964), pp. 71-7. The demolition of Packer's hypothesis by Fredeman is outlined in some detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.
- 6) Flowers, Betty S., 'The Kingly Self' in Kent ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 159-74, quotation p. 160
- 7) Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* p. 10
- 8) *Ibid* p. 3
- 9) Eliot, T. S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *The Sacred Wood* (London; Methuen, 1920) pp. 42-53, quotation p. 48
- 10) Letter quoted in Sanders, Mary F., *The Life of Christina Rossetti* (London; Hutchinson, 1930) pp. 85-6
- 11) Milton, John, *The Poems of John Milton* ed. Carey, J. and Fowler, A. (London; Longmans, 1966) pp. 146-8
- 12) Wordsworth, William, *Poetical Works* (London; Edward Moxon, 1869) pp. 441-3
- 13) Coleridge, Samuel T., *Complete Poetical Works* ed. Coleridge, E. H., (Oxford; Clarendon, 1912) pp. 362-8, quotation pp. 364-5

- 14) Rowse, A. L., ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London; Macmillan, 1964) Sonnet 73, p. 148
- 15) see Dobbs, B. and J., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti; An Alien Victorian* (London; Macdonald, 1977) pp. 34, 145
- 16) Blake, William, *Poems* ed., Stevenson, W. H. (London; Longman, 1971) p. 146
- 17) Cantalupo, Catherine M., 'Christina Rossetti the Devotional Poet and the Rejection of Romantic Nature' in Kent ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 274-300, quotation p. 279
- 18) Quotations from *Later Life* are given by the number of the sonnet in the sequence of twenty eight, and line numbers of that sonnet. the sequence was published in the *Pageant* volume (1881) but the dates of composition of the sonnets, thought to range from 1860 to 1879, are not recorded.
- 19) Shelley, Percy B., *A Defence of Poetry* in *Complete Works* 10 vols. ed. Ingpen, R., and Peck, W. E., (London; Ernest Benn, 1965) VII pp. 105-40, quotation p. 116
- 20) *Ibid* p. 112
- 21) Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude* ed. De Selincourt, E., (Oxford; O. U. P., 1970) p. 100
- 22) Belsey, Catherine, 'The Romantic Construction of the Unconscious' in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-84* Barker, F. ed., (London, Methuen 1986) pp. 57-76, quotation pp. 58-9
- 23) Rossetti, Christina, *Letter and Spirit, Notes on the Commandments* (London; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1883) p. 10
- 24) *Ibid* p. 13
- 25) Cantalupo, in Kent ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 282-3
- 26) see Blake, Kathleen, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature* (Sussex; Harvester, 1983) ch. 1 'Christina Rossetti's Poetry: The Art of Self-Postponement' pp. 3-25
- 27) Armstrong, Isobel, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth Century Poetry* (Sussex; Harvester, 1982) p. xiii

2. DREAMS AND DREAMING

What can it mean? you ask. I answer not
For meaning, but myself must echo, What?
Christina Rossetti, 'My Dream'

I

In attempting an investigation of Christina Rossetti's treatment, discussion and narration of dreams and dream sequences I hope to pursue further the notion that a main function of her writing is an exposition of the belief that meaning, at all levels, is not a fixed, but a relative thing. I wish to illustrate - before consolidating the case with examination of pieces such as *The Prince's Progress* and the *Monna Innominata* cycle - that the poetics of the Rossetti text where language and signification are concerned serve repeatedly to stress the non-unified nature and potential uncontainability of the self. To facilitate this, it will first be necessary to give a general introductory statement concerning the treatment of dream experience in poetry of the Romantic period, attempting to show the manner in which this outlook provides an invaluable position from which to assess the strategies at work in Christina Rossetti's verse, especially that dealing openly with 'other-worldly' experience. I intend to show that Christina Rossetti's interest in dreams and their meanings is a predictable step in the unified strategy of her written output, an extension of the concerns located in the poetry looked at in the previous chapter.

It will then be instructive to provide a discussion of the treatment of the dream as an occurrence itself in the Rossetti canon, rather than the events contained therein, and the difference in this treatment between the 'devotional' and the 'secular' poetry. A selection of poems will be

compared and contrasted in order to highlight the (often subtle) differences in treatment of the dream at narrative and symbolic levels which result from Christina Rossetti's manipulation of modes of writing inherited from the Romantic period. This will preface a study of the open presentation of dream narrative and how this relates to the wider concerns of Christina Rossetti's lyric writing, as interpreted in this study, and the lexical and symbolic arrangements exhibited therein. The aim will be to isolate a working strategy relating to the manner of symbolism and causality employed, to illustrate what this might tell us about the attitude of Christina Rossetti's verses towards dreams, their narratives and ideas of meaning in general. In particular, I wish to illustrate the ways in which Rossetti dramatically reworks the Romantic attitude towards dreaming and the imagination, hence towards poetic creation and the reading process itself.

Midway through Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, in discussing the nature and importance of 'order' as opposed to the 'shambles' implied by any intrusion of 'spontaneity' onto things, Guildenstern declares;

A Chinaman of the T'ang Dynasty - and, by which definition, a philosopher - dreamed he was a butterfly, and from that moment he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher. Envy him; in his two-fold security. (1)

The approach outlined here, afforded a misleading degree of flippancy by its being couched in a somewhat Wildean epigrammatic form, is an interesting, and certainly a provocative starting point in a discussion

of the treatment of dreams and dreaming in literature. Whereas the butterfly is given no temporal restrictions and typifies the timeless world of nature, the Chinaman is fixed in time and geography; he is from China and, being 'of the T'ang Dynasty', is thus ascribed to a particular historical period. He is the subject of every clause of the sentence - the first of the passage - which delights in equating his fortunes with that of the small insect; in other words, we see the riddle from the perspective of the subject, the Chinaman, who is to be respected since he is 'a philosopher', and in being called to 'Envy him' we are urged towards some kind of identification with him. The scenario is a loaded one. The Chinaman seemingly represents 'real', existence as we know it, whilst the butterfly (Gk. Psyche = moth, butterfly), a suitably delicate and vulnerable image emblemises the 'unreal', less substantial world of the dream. The 'philosopher' partakes uncertainly of both spheres of meaning. In doing so, he recognises the 'reality' of imagination whilst simultaneously describing the potential dichotomy between the diverse realms thus generated.

So, seen conventionally, Guildenstern's argument would appear to be weighted in favour of the typical pre-Romantic, pre-Psychological view of the dream and its pertinence to waking reality. The seeming flippancy of his observation does not only reside in its construction: his conclusion, that we should 'Envy' the Chinaman 'in his two-fold security' seems at odds with these premises. We might expect to be encouraged to scoff at the philosopher's bewilderment, not to be jealous of the 'security' it allows him to assume. The admirable principle of 'order' Guildenstern deduces from the fable can only stem from the co-existence

of two alternative spheres of being, thus creating the sense of 'two-fold' stability attained by way of simultaneous alternatives which appear to be contraries. Whatever the terms of the argument itself as portrayed, where the 'dream' is clearly just that and the 'dreamer' is firmly rooted in an identifiable 'reality', the conclusion hints heavily that the two areas of existence might just be differently constructed views of the world, neither having superiority, which, when understood as compatible versions of what might be termed 'real', allow us a subtler vision.

But this conclusion is one very much of Stoppard's epoch, the twentieth century, rather than of that period inhabited by Guildenstern within the fiction of the drama. It is a viewpoint whose conception and history are worth tracing, since it is one that forms a major feature of Christina Rossetti's treatment of dream experience. One recent commentator has noted;

Dream is the commonest challenge to everyday reality
... Dreams... create new models of reality. (2)

It is debateable whether dreams 'create' or are *the creation of* 'new models of reality', but the point is a valid one nonetheless. The revolution which took place in the field of scientific knowledge during the Seventeenth century was matched by the Protestant loss of certitude as to the literal truth of Christian cosmology. Prior to this, in ancient and medieval times, literal faith in Christian myth - in the existence of demons and angels and the possibility of spiritual visitation - had

meant that dreams were taken literally by philosophers as physiological proof of the actuality of the spiritual plane. The rise of rationalistic thinking during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I meant that dreams were relegated 'into an intellectual limbo' (3), regarded as unscientific, unclassifiable and no longer objectively tenable as evidence of a now widely doubted spiritual 'reality'. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* draws much of its energy from an investigation of the worth of various alternative perspectives onto what might be regarded as a stable 'reality'. In the play, the waking weaver, Bottom, muses;

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream
past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is
but an ass if he go about to expound this dream.
Methought I was - there is no man can tell what...
The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not
seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to
conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. (4)

The repeated confusion of agent and qualifying verb form - 'eye/heard', 'hand/taste' etc. - stress here the incompatibility (in Bottom's low but worthy opinion) of the dream experience with any value codes established from common experience (though, on one level, the grammar is the code and the comedy lies in our suspicion that there *is* a kind of sense in Bottom's words). Elsewhere, the Duke Theseus concludes;

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact. (5)

The joke, again, is in the failure of the speaker to see that he, too, is a figment of the poet's dream, and that without the imagination of the poet he would not 'exist'. In hindsight, the lovers themselves view the strange night-time events in the wood as 'small and undistinguishable,/Like far-off mountains turned into clouds...'. All these comments seem to urge a lack of trust toward any type of non-real experience: dreams and visions are all very well, but only when seen as such, as abnormal interludes, and what a relief it is to have both feet back upon the solid turf of reality. But, typical of the Shakespearean text, of the period when notions of dreams and their value were shifting, there is another argument implicit within the drama. In pragmatic terms, the confusion of the illusory and the real might well be undesirable, but could not the correlation of the two prove educative in offering new perspectives and widening our notions of ourselves? The theatre is the dream of life. Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons and in many ways the essence of a sympathetic, feminine nature within the context of the play can see this;

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable. (6)

'Constancy' has grown from the 'transfiguration' (this unusual term is not casually placed) in perspective afforded to the lovers by the dream-like events of the night. As one critic of the play puts it, 'The illusory has its part in the total experience of reality' (7). With Theseus's telling admission that

...as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name... (8)

one is reminded of the essential point that, representing the imagination untethered to guideposts of consecutive reason, dreams offer endless possibilities to the 'poet's pen' or to the conception of (not just fantastical) literature itself. The psychologist H. J. Eysenck has remarked;

...the major part in dreams is played
by visual images, and ... conceptual thought
appears to be resolved into some form of
plastic representation. (9)

This recalls Ezra Pound's citation - in a discussion of the ways in which language may be charged with meaning - of what is termed 'PHANOPOEIA ... which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination' (10) and further Dryden's famous declaration that 'Imaging ... is in itself the very height and life of poetry.' (11) The interest that the world of dreams presents to the poetic imagination is immediately apparent. Equally apparent, from even the most superficial of surveys of the varying attitude towards what might be called 'other-worldly' experience in the literary field, is the fact that, whilst logic and rationality have at times been posited dogmatically as the only objectively 'true' norm, there have also been other standpoints which have contradicted this opinion and have actively sought to promote the significance and wholesomeness of dreams and the life of the unconscious.

With this in mind, I propose briefly to examine the attitude towards the imagination - and the relevance specifically afforded to dream experience in this quarter - displayed in the work of the Romantics. I believe that there are important ways in which Christina Rossetti's treatment of dreams and dreaming is conditioned by her inheritance of Romantic values and, furthermore, by her desire to rework these modes of thought into a personalised manner of articulating other-worldly experience. Romantic thought is, both historically and ideologically speaking, crucially relevant to Christina Rossetti's poetry, providing a context within which her treatment of dreams may be considered. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the legacy of literary and philosophical thought available as raw material to Rossetti is adopted idly. Like many Victorian poets, Christina Rossetti is involved in a conscious rewriting of the radical shift in thought brought about by the Romantics in antagonism to the earlier stress on the principle of Reason, and the neglect of what they were to elevate as the creative power of the imagination.

A note of made by Coleridge on his voyage to Malta in 1804 is of particular interest here, questioning the value of the traditional distinction between dream and supposed actuality to the disparagement of the former.

Poetry a rationalised dream dealing (? with) to
manifold Forms (? of) our own Feelings, that
never perhaps were attached by us consciously to our
own personal Selves ... O there are Truths
below the Surface in the subject of Sympathy,
and how we become that which we understandly (sic)
behold and hear, having, how much God perhaps only



knows, created part even of the Form. (12)

This hypothesis involves an open recognition of what one critic defines as the 'dream-like identity of the feeling and the form' of poetry, negotiating an important connection between the process of perception and the simultaneous assimilation (and/or production) of meaning where we 'become that which we... behold and hear'. Such a collapse into one another of spheres previously conceived of as separate areas requires us to admit that boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious are far from clearly defined. Poetic conception, the rationalisation of the dream, is held to be a partly unconscious function - 'below the Surface' - but these energies must then be modified and shaped by the conscious mind. As his *Notebooks* and *Biographia Literaria* show, Coleridge was profoundly interested in the psychology of dreams and dreaming, and frequently turned his attention to analysing the likely degrees of control that the conscious mind might have over these seemingly unconscious manifestations. One commentator notes;

... between the normal modes of mental activity and the passivity of dreaming there are various states in which the usual controls imposed by the will and the reason are relaxed in differing degrees, and to these Coleridge applied the term 'reverie'. It included not merely ordinary day-dreaming but... opium reveries and nightmares as well. (13)

Consequently, it is fair to read *The Ancient Mariner* - a work inspired by an actual dream of Coleridge's friend Cruikshank - as a piece possessing all the splendour and unrestricted fluency of a dream which is then, by means of an embedded narrative technique and traditional

balladic presentation, subsequently submitted to the strictures and ordering principles lent by the operations of the conscious mind. The latin epigraph to the poem, adapted by Coleridge from Thomas Burnet's *Archaeologiae Philosophicae* (1692) draws attention immediately to this facet of the work's strategy;

Facile credo, plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam
visibiles in rerum universitate... Harum rerum notitiam
semper ambivit ingenium humanum, nunquam attigit. Juvat,
interea, non diffiteor, quandoque in animo, tanquam in
tabula, majoris et melioris mundi imaginem contemplari:
ne mens assuefacta hodiernae vitae minutiis se contrahat
nimis, et tota subsidat in pusillas cogitationes. Sed
veritati interea invigilandum est, modusque servandus,
ut certa ab incertis, diem a nocte, distinguamus.

[I readily believe that there are more invisible
than visible Natures in the universe... The human
mind has always sought the knowledge of these
things, but never attained it. Meanwhile, I do
not deny that it is helpful sometimes to
contemplate in the mind, as on a tablet, the
image of a greater and better world, lest the
intellect, habituated to the petty things of
daily life, narrow itself and sink wholly into
trivial thoughts. But at the same time we must be
watchful for the truth and keep a sense of proportion,
so that we may distinguish the certain from the
uncertain, day from the night.] (14)

The concern is undoubtedly with the blending of conscious and unconscious sides of the psyche (the Chinese philosopher and butterfly as one), the fusion of the two levels in the service of poetic creation, wherein poetry becomes indeed representative of a 'rationalised dream'. Similarly in 'Kubla Khan', whose subtitle is 'A Vision In A Dream', the atmosphere is that of a dream landscape renegotiated in the light of conscious inventory and evaluation of its contents;

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me... (15)

Thus the speaker of 'Kubla Khan' recalling the dream vision of the 'damsel with a dulcimer', retrospectively attempting to distance the 'I' which now speaks from the inhabitant of the 'vision... once I saw', an operation which appears far from straightforward once one considers the questions which arise related to divisions (conscious/unconscious and otherwise) within the articulate self at other levels in the poem. 'Kubla Khan' works at several levels; it is, simultaneously, a statement about imagination and the creation of art, an erotic drama, and a political statement (echoing Coleridge's earlier poem 'The Fall of the Bastille', whilst the implications of the 'pleasure dome' are nearer to the great houses of Europe threatened by revolution - the 'underground' - and so, archetypally, Versailles). However, importantly, on another symbolic plane, the subject of this piece may be taken as being the (con)fusion of conscious/unconscious forces engaged in the act of creative activity, and it is the nature of this operation which the poem itself may be taken as imaging. The sinister 'caverns measureless to man' from which the 'sacred river' emerges to rush through Khan's 'gardens bright with sinuous rills' vividly propose the idea of the differing levels of creative energy involved in the dreamlike act of poetic production, and, moreover, the several levels of reality which become fused in this process, causing subject and object to collapse into one another, the outer world becoming the inner. Adair summarises this feature of Coleridge's artistic strategy which became symptomatic of the whole Romantic approach to poetry;

The schism which science had made between subject and object, man's consciousness and the surrounding world, Coleridge struggled all his life to close, both in poetry and philosophy. But he only really succeeded in his greatest imaginative poems, and then only for a brief period. In *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* the inner and outer world become one: the idea and the image are fused in the waking dream. (16)

Coleridge's substantial exploration of this aspect of poetic creation, in part influenced by the conception of the subconscious offered in German Romantic philosophy in general and Schelling in particular, strongly demands that the notion of symbolic imagery as fundamental to poetry be accepted without reservation. A new mythology is born, guaranteed not by the conventional and calculated employment of classical allusion, but rather stimulated by the realisation that the imagination's deepest subconscious patternings must be taken as archetypal, symbolic and thus 'mythopoeic' in character. Poetry was no longer to be regarded as mimetic of an external 'reality', where imagery fulfilled a constitutional rhetorical function, but in its fusion of subject and object, its potential to disrupt so called certainties as to levels of consciousness and linked ability to reconcile opposites, the image becomes emblematic of truth newly created through art. The internal is made external and imagination finds itself elevated from the position of begrudged irresponsibility to the status of commanding spirit. The image - its authenticity arising from depths more profound than the simpler fields of memory, wit or fancy - may communicate more than the consciously intended meaning of the work or the writer, creating as it does a fresh reality of its own positioned beyond the areas of intelligibility conventionally divulged in utterance. This idea is deftly conveyed in a

sonnet of Christina Rossetti's written in the winter of 1856 entitled 'In An Artist's Studio' (*Works*, p. 330):

One face looks out from all his canvases,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden just behind those screens...

Coincidentally, and significantly addressing the notion of the male-monopolised construction of female identity in art to be tackled at length in *Monna Innominata* (see Chapter 5), it becomes clear in this sonnet that the medium by which the 'nameless girl' is translated into art upon the canvas cannot detract from the significance engineered by considerations beyond the superficial representative qualities of the painted image - that instant which intentionality seizes upon and thence decrees the pictorial nature of the image. All signs point to that which remains constant behind these 'screens';

A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
A saint, an angel - every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.

The varying external images are all devices by which the 'same one' essential concept is imparted, the constant object of inspiration which the artist 'feeds upon... by day and night' and which, in turn, may affect the artist in manifold ways, 'Fair as the moon and joyful as the light'. Just as different ways of seeing are involved in the totality of perception, the truth created by the fusion of the manifold images may appear as concealed or deliberately reflected, but remains the same

elemental truth, represented by and yet ever beyond the image of itself which we are allowed to view;

We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.

The mirror 'gave back' the 'loveliness' of the figure and, by verbal association, the subject of the paintings 'looks back' on the artist, becoming a mirror to reflect his being, enabling a construction to be made on the other side of actuality - 'Not as she is...' - reflecting and externalising the non-rational impulses of the artist. Conclusively and crucially, turning the sonnet into much more than a study in artistic representationalism, the figure appears 'Not as she is, but as she fills his dream'.

The parallel stated here in the Rossetti text between the mechanism of the artistic image and the symbolism of neurotic and unconscious fantasy, hence dreams and dreaming, is an important acknowledgement of the study made in this area by the Romantics, above all by one of Christina's favourite poet's, Coleridge, an interest motivating much of the poetry of that period. The Romantic ideal was the resolution of all earthly antitheses, a fusion of subject and object fuelled by a belief in the continued existence of the past and the marvellous potential of its revival;

They wanted to reflect in their poetry not the fixed splendor of God's eternity, but their own personal, confused apprehension, in the here and now, of a human timelessness. They took hold of the idea of eternity; but they removed it from its empyrean world

into their own. In brief, paradoxically, they brought
Eternity into Time. (17)

The positing of a collective, universal unconscious (later to be redefined in the works of Jung and his followers) had occupied sections of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, making the soul into a treasure trove, a centre the component parts of which could be reflected by external images, and from which inassimilable source arises poetic creation. The careful acknowledgement of these factors in the work of the Romantics leads inevitably to a fundamental questioning of authority, of the I-as-subject, seized upon, as I hope to illustrate in this chapter, by Rossetti and used as a central motif in the poetic text, and in particular in her treatment of dreams and dreaming. André Beguin summarises the new awareness as follows;

If anything distinguishes the Romantic from all his predecessors and makes him the true imitator of modern aesthetics, it is precisely that he is always highly conscious of the bonds that link him with the dark realm inside himself. The Romantic poet, knowing that he is not the sole author of his work, having found out that poetry is primarily a song risen from the abyss, tries deliberately and in complete lucidity to induce the mysterious voice to rise. It is not the source itself nor the method of his writing which is very different, for the act of poetic creation is in these respects fixed from all eternity; the only real difference lies in the poet's attitude to these laws of spiritual fecundity. (18)

The Romantic believes that everything is centred upon the self, and yet a lack of confidence concerning the stability and unity of the self continually nags at this faith. The awareness that this internal matrix is reflected by poetry's outward summoning wholly renegotiates the

relation between perceiver and that which is perceived, and the realm of other worldly, dream experience becomes a model upon which this representational dilemma may be played out. In *The Unmediated Vision*, Geoffrey Hartman declares that one of the functions of Wordsworth's poetics is unsuccessfully to locate a position where that 'kind of imperceptible cognition' which is the poetic imagination can be true both to itself and to the external world. Wordsworth fails to resolve this dichotomy since

... although it can be argued that his final
tendency is toward an imageless vision, he
claims the necessity of the external world
for this end. (19)

The momentum is felt in Romantic verse toward that point where 'the statement of a relation' may exist 'in such immediate terms that no incitement to relational thinking remains'. It is my belief that the analysis of dreams and dreaming contained in some of the writings of Christina Rossetti forms a sustained re-interpretation of this condition.

Any literary text which revels in examining its own conception, motivations and status may wish to take advantage of the widened scope of reference and causality permitted by the investigation of dream and suchlike areas of experience. The work of the nineteenth century thinker Sir Francis Galton (who introduced the principle of 'association' to psychology) and, of course, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, successfully applying scientific methods to the study of dreams, gradually made an interest in dreams 'intellectually respectable' (20).

Freud was highly aware of the manner in which dreams represented a 'transfiguration' of one code of reality into another, noting in *An Outline Of Psychoanalysis* that;

Dreams, as everyone knows, may be confused, unintelligible, or positively nonsensical, what they say may contradict all that we know of reality, and we behave in them like insane people, since, so long as we are dreaming, we attribute objective reality to the contents of the dream. (21)

The frame of meaning generated within a dream may indeed seem to 'contradict all that we know of reality', and yet be judged by that 'reality'. This idea is expressed in a very brief and very charming manner in a poem from Christina Rossetti's 1872 *Sing-Song* collection of children's verse;

'I dreamt I caught a little owl
And the bird was blue -'

'But you may hunt for ever
And not find such an one.

'I dreamt I set a sunflower,
And red as blood it grew -'

'But such a sunflower never
Bloomed beneath the sun.' (Works, p. 440)

This little verse simultaneously unifies and separates imagination and 'reality'. But if this serves to remind us on waking that the 'reality' we might be tempted to hold up as the 'norm' is actually just one of many possible self-contained frames of reference, then it is a positive step. In 'An Old World Thicket' (Works, pp. 64-5), with its Dantean epigram

'una selva oscura' and setting, Christina Rossetti transports us to a fantastical realm, disengaging our certainties by the hypnotic repetitions;

Awake or sleeping (for I know not which)
I was or was not mazed within a wood...
(Asleep or waking, for I know not which)...

This intriguing opening, whilst clearly echoing the final couplet of Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' - 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream?/... Do I wake or sleep? (22) - distinctly recalls the moment, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when the confused lovers emerge from the wood;

Lysander: ... I shall reply amazedly,
Half sleep, half waking. But as yet, I swear,
I cannot truly say how I came here...

Demetrius: Are you sure
That we are awake. It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream. (23)

The pivotal point in Rossetti's poem, marking a shift in tone from awe and wonder to sharp anxiety, comes with the speaker's (dreamer's) realisation, contemplating a Paradise-like scenario of accentuated natural surroundings, that, to cite again a phrase considered earlier in this study, 'all that was but showed what all was not' (*Ibid*, p. 64). In other words, the acceptance of one sphere of reality, with its own codes acceptable upon its own terms if not by the values we are accustomed to respect simultaneously represents the admittance that more than one 'version' of reality is possible;

Their meat was nought but flowers like butterflies,
With berries coral-coloured or like gold...

By comparing and contrasting the implications inscribed within these separate models of existence, the poet is able to move toward conclusions concerning the generation of modes of discourse, the hidden assumptions upon which they rely for their self-justification. Literature of dreams can illustrate to us, by means of the assertion of the complete substantiality of the 'other' or 'non-real' experience, the loopholes in what we might consider a watertight rationality. And if we can come to accept the declaration, forwarded by Breton in the *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, that dream as a mode of being may tell us as much about ourselves as 'real' life, then the possibilities for an investigation of the relative nature of reference and meaning are significantly increased (24).

Sir Maurice Bowra, in *The Romantic Imagination*, acknowledges of Christina Rossetti;

In her we see a truly Romantic temperament,
trained to look for beauty in mysterious
realms of experience, and able to find it
without any strain or forcing of herself... so great
were her gifts for the interpretation of strange
corners of life and fancy... She was often enough
content to withdraw into fancies and dreams and to
find a full satisfaction in the world of her
imagination. (25)

This 'temperament' is provides the energetic inquisitiveness we locate behind such generously uninhibited works of the imagination as *Goblin*

Market and *The Prince's Progress*. Rossetti's excursions into the area of 'fancies and dreams' was never simply an escapist *withdrawal*, but rather a positive attempt to broaden the referential capacities of her poetry. Yet there is a constant fixation in her work with an attempt 'to see what the other world is really like' (26) which does not manifest itself so openly in the colourful dream-like narrations of the two works cited above, but functions on an altogether subtler level. Of the eleven hundred poems of Christina Rossetti hitherto published, roughly ten per cent concern themselves, often wholly, with some kind of attitude towards dreams and dreaming. Sometimes, as in 'An Old World Thicket' (*Works*, pp. 64-8), 'A Ballad Of Boding' (*Works*, p. 55) and 'My Dream' (*Works*, p. 315), the actual substance of the other-worldly experience is set down, questioned, interpreted or simply left to speak for itself. But there are many more lyrics where it is not the substance, but rather the idea of the dream itself is the subject at hand.

Charles Rycroft, in a study entitled *The Innocence Of Dreams*, has noted that;

No dreams dreamt by Christ are recorded in the New Testament ... It is tempting to correlate the lack of any record of Christ's dreams with the fact that dream interpretation plays no part in Christian religious theory or practice. (27)

Not surprisingly, one does detect a difference in approach to the topic of the dream in Christina Rossetti's outwardly devotional lyrics - where, indeed dreams and dreaming do crop up less regularly than in the more secular pieces. But it must be noted that the dichotomy of

treatment is not at all as clear cut as might at first be expected, and the frequent usage by the poet of the notion of 'sleep' as euphemistically denoting death (a literary convention itself - one recalls the 'To be or not to be' speech in *Hamlet* and Keats' 'Sonnet to Sleep' (28) - further complicates matters. The two separate states, sleep and death, may be categorised together as manners of 'Rest' in traditionally Christian terms. This is the proposition offered by the opening lines of an early poem, 'The Dream' (*Works*, pp. 104-5), directly recalling Hamlet's plaintive 'Rest, rest, perturbed spirit' (29);

Rest, rest; the troubled breast
Panteth evermore for rest:-
Be it sleep or be it death,
Rest is all it coveteth.

The expected distinction between the two modes, the orthodox view of death as 'dreamless' sleep is forthcoming in the devotional and secular poems. The pious verse, 'There Remaineth Therefore A Rest For The People Of God' (a very slight misquotation of *Hebrews* 4.ix, substituting 'for' for 'to') presents death as a 'blessed ... secret ... heavy dreamless sleep' (*Works*, p. 200). 'Autumn', written in 1858, describes the death of a 'solitary swallow';

One latest, solitary swallow flies
Across the sea, rough autumn-tempest-tossed:
Poor bird, shall it be lost?
Dropped down into this uncongenial sea,
With no kind eyes
To watch it while it dies,
Ungessed, uncared for, free:
Set free at last,
The short pang past,
In sleep, in death, in dreamless sleep locked fast.

(*Works*, p. 338)

This final line is poignantly, though probably unwittingly recalled in what is generally reckoned to be the last poem Christina Rossetti wrote before her own death, the beautifully resigned 'Sleeping At Last' (the title is William Michael's, not Christina's), which pictures the lost one within her grave beneath the 'purple thyme and the purple clover';

No more a tired heart downcast or overcast,
No more pangs that wring or shifting fears that hover,
Sleeping at last in a dreamless sleep locked fast.

(*Works*, p. 417)

But Rossetti, characteristically, is not content idly to adopt this one conventional system of articulation as an ultimate certitude. From the perspective of this single frame of reference death may well be metaphorically imaged as 'dreamless sleep', but this proposition is not casually accepted. 'Days Of Vanity' (*Works*, p. 388), and here we recall the Chinese Emperor of Stoppard's play, performs the inversion;

A dream that waketh ...
Such is life that dieth.

Here, broadly speaking, one detects the Platonic view ('Among very great authors, none ... seemed to appeal to her more than Plato...' (*Works*, p. lxx) / of life on earth as a mere pale reflection of the higher form of existence to be enjoyed hereafter. This attitude is wholly compatible with a Christian standpoint, of course, and yet the vital ambivalence in the symbolic possibilities offered - death as 'sleeping' yet also

'waking' - become an invaluable point of release for the poet investigating the relative nature of ways of allocating meaning. To envision death as 'in a dreamless sleep locked fast' forces external description to be a terminus - imaginative potential dies along with the sleeper's unpermitted vision. The tension aroused by this dilemma operates at a latent level in 'Life And Death' (*Works*, pp. 358-9), both of whose stanzas open in rather too prosaically dogmatic a manner, as if the speaker is vainly trying to convince us of the validity of these simply voiced (all but one word are monosyllabic) maxims;

Life is not sweet. One day it will be sweet
To shut our eyes and die ...

Life is not good. One day it will be good
To die then live again;
To sleep meanwhile ...

All is not well here. Within the matrix of meaning generated by the poem as a semantic device there resides a contradiction which the contents of the verse fail to resolve. 'Life' is defined as 'not sweet' and 'not good' - two negative instances - and thus it 'will be sweet/To ... die'. This is fine, but if 'Life is not good' then to state that 'it will be good/To ... live again' represents, within the framework of meaning constructed by the terms of the poem, a glaring non-sequitur. Matters are not assisted and little comfort offered by the fact that the rest of the poem consists (bar the final couplet) of a repeated chain of negative constructions 'Nor ... Nor... Nor...' - hence associated grammatically with 'Life' which was guaranteed as a negative essence - each one a luxuriant descriptive image of those aspects of life which will be

forsaken in death. The 'flitting butterfly ... happy lark that soars sky-high ... the waxing wheat ... Rich ranks of golden grain' - all these natural images are linked grammatically and essentially with 'Life'. The 'sleep meanwhile' of death represents a renunciation of all these elements. Standing as pictures of abundance, the natural vignettes are surely desirable and so it truly would 'be good/To ... live again'. But in this case the assertions that 'Life is not sweet ... not good' become contradictory to the strategy that the rest of the work follows. After the invocation to 'sleep meanwhile' the second stanza begins to deal not with the absence of plenitude, but more so with the absence of absences; in sleep we will 'not ... feel';

...the wane
Of shrunk leaves dropping in the wood,
... Nor mark the blackened bean-fields, nor, where stood
Rich ranks of golden grain,
Only dead refuse stubble clothe the plain...

The poem in many senses does not seem able to make up its own mind where its emphasis ought to lie. From the relinquished fecundity of the first stanza we move to the scarcity of the second; both presence and absence will become absent in sleep, and the usage of the word 'dead' in 'dead refuse stubble' only adds to the confusion. The tension between opposing forces implied in the poem's title 'Life And Death' is rapidly superseded by the energy created by the text's endeavours to challenge its own premises. By the time the final line of the poem is reached, the reader's feeling is one of unease with the overall philosophy of the piece. In hindsight, the glib opening statement, 'Life is not sweet', rings hollow since the events, semantically and grammatically, of the

poem have destroyed all certainty as to the truth of the work's initial premise. We would like to 'live again' since we have been convinced that to 'die' would leave us asleep to the things that are good in life. The final line strikes, then, an ambiguous note;

... where stood
Rich ranks of golden grain,
Only dead refuse stubble clothe the plain:
Asleep from risk, asleep from pain.

'Risk', the potential for ambivalence of result as opposed to direct certitude, and 'pain' as opposed to harmonious complacency and pleasure, are elements we find consistently motivating the poetry of Christina Rossetti. The similarity to Keats here is, again, striking - particularly the sentiments of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' in which some commentators have, rightly, located the implicit importance of risk and pain in a world which is a 'vale of soulmaking' ((30)). Forever striving to illustrate the relativity of meaning and reference Christina Rossetti's verse continually moves towards areas of 'risk' and 'pain' in its attempt to examine, and often blow asunder, its own strategies and methods of construction. When we turn later to a detailed examination of the sonnet cycle, *Monna Innominata* (*Works*, pp. 58-64) we shall witness the epitome of this drive. Where Rossetti's attitude to traditional notions of dream, sleep and death is concerned, the eye for dualities is ever alert;

I must unlearn the pleasant ways I went,
Must learn another ... (*Works*, p. 304)

Thus the speaker of 'After All', and in the same way the Rossetti text repeatedly seeks to 'unlearn' the inscribed presuppositions it relies upon for its (at least literal) integrity. A poem mentioned earlier, 'The Dream' (*Works*, pp. 104-5) , - whose main theme, like 'A Ballad Of Boding' (*Ibid*, pp. 55-8), is 'that which is not ... but seems!' - makes clear the yearning to demonstrate the sub-textual implications manifest in what is, seemingly, an inoffensive discussion of the nature of dreams.

Tell me, dost thou remember the old time
We sat together by that sunny stream,
And dreamed our happiness was too sublime
Only to be a dream ?

At a central point in this poem, and marking a shift in tone, comes the revelation '... now that thou art gone ...' and so, from the start (as is the case in *Monna Innominata*) it is clear that the speaker is addressing an absence. In the idyllic and temporally non-specific setting afforded by the second stanza (above), the speaker recalls proving that something could not simply be 'a dream' by dreaming of that very something. The attempt is to dream something into reality, and this is in effect achieved by the realisation, in a dream, that the 'happiness' must be more than a dream itself. Thus dreams are relegated, on a Platonic type of hierarchy leading to ultimate truth, to a level below that of the reality of the situation the speaker and addressee are conceived of as being in. And yet it is by means of a dream that the speaker is able to gain this insight. 'Maiden May' (*Works*, pp. 401-2) begins as a simple ballad, as pretty as the 'bower' in which May sits;

Maiden May sat in her bower,

In her blush rose bower in flower,
Sweet of scent;
Sat and dreamed away an hour,
Half content, half discontent.

But the dream which May is permitted becomes the key to all sorts of knowledge and revelation, as she contemplates nature and the universe, we would scarcely think possible judging by the poem's humble opening;

Wherefore greatest? Wherefore least?
Hearts that starve and hearts that feast?
You and I?
Stammering Oracles have ceased,
And the whole world stands at 'why?'

This poem dramatically illustrates the possibility that 'dream' may be able to unfold new and unexpected perspectives upon that which we might otherwise ignore or take for granted. This, in turn, is a sharp reminder of the relativity of frames of reference, a theme in which we detect a purpose running through too many of Christina Rossetti's works for it to be random.

Another theme which we have located in the Rossetti text is the investigation, literally and symbolically, of the inner processes leading up to and constituting the creative function in the artist. How might the attention to dreams relate to this other concern? The following passage comes from Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, published during Christina Rossetti's lifetime in 1871.

The Imagination is one of the highest prerogatives of man. By this faculty he unites former images and ideas, independently of the will, and thus creates

brilliant and novel results ... Dreaming gives us
the best notion of this power; as Jean Paul (Richter)
... says, 'The dream is an involuntary kind of poetry.' (31)

Bearing this Coleridgean idea (and, like Coleridge, arrived at via German thought) in mind, we will now move to an assessment of Christina Rossetti's use of the notion of the dream and how this is interwoven with another of the major concerns of her work, the inquiry into the machinations of the creative psyche.

The 1857 poem 'Fata Morgana' (*Works*, p. 330) conveys the speaker's sense of despair at compulsively and forever pursuing the elusive, shape-changing Fata Morgana, a figure from mythology traditionally associated with healing, magic and fertility but also with the more threatening and sinister person of Morgan le Fay, ominous, elusive sister to the king in Arthurian myth, repeated in Tennyson's *Idylls*.

A blue-eyed phantom far before
Is laughing, leaping toward the sun:
Like lead I chase it evermore,
I pant and run.

In Christina Rossetti's poem, however, it quickly becomes clear that the 'blue-eyed phantom' may be regarded as a symbol of the speaker's imaginative self, the poet's spirit (in both senses of the term) of creativity. To further facilitate and substantially reinforce this identification the fleeing vision is directly - and this as much Rossetti's own invention as an idea inherited with the Morgana myth - associated with 'singing' and 'song' in the poem's second stanza;

It breaks the sunlight bound on bound:
Goes singing as it leaps along
To sheep-bells with a dreamy sound
A dreamy song.

The poem becomes a self-reflexive testimony to the poet's search and desire for inspiration, with the sought after creative energy crystallised into the vibrant and vivid image of the attractive phantom. The potential for artistic endeavour offered by the Fata Morgana muse - the 'song' which is sung - is twice described as being 'dreamy' and the use of this adjective is not simply casual. The moment of poetic fruition, and artistic creation in general, is a subject frequently investigated by Christina Rossetti's verse at literal, or more often (as here) at symbolic level. It is a topic which, like dreams themselves, does not lend itself to empirical, scientific categorisation; of the hazy, twilight realm of experience, the creative process lends itself well to expression, metaphorically, in images of 'dreamy' connotation. One recalls H. J. Eysenck's statement, cited earlier;

... the major part in dreams is played by visual images,
and ... conceptual thought appears to be resolved into
some form of plastic representation. (32)

Thus the dream itself may be taken as not unlike poetry in its conception and articulation. The peculiar sense of privacy which surrounds dream as experience, the mystery therein, and the impossibility of paraphrasing without distorting the dream vision provide further relationships with the creative, artistic function. In Christina Rossetti's poem, the experience of chasing the source of

inspiration, the Fata Morgana, indeed becomes, in the third and final stanza, an address made by the speaker to his/her own self.

I laugh, it is so brisk and gay;
It is so far before, I weep:
I hope I shall lie down some day,
Lie down and sleep.

Consciousness of the self here, as in so many of Rossetti's lyrics, marks the simultaneous, confession - implicit, as we have seen in some Romantic texts - that the self is in a state of division. This ambiguity state is splendidly conveyed by both structure and import of the first two lines of this stanza. 'I laugh I weep:' - the two opposing ideas, two versions of the 'I' pronoun denoting the fractured state of the speaker at differing moments in time, are indeed split apart in the syntax of the lines. And that which causes the plausibility of, and calls attention (metaphorically and syntactically) to this dichotomy is the image of the 'blue-eyed phantom' - '... it is so brisk and gay;/It is so far before ...'. Confronted by this knowledge of the division in the self revealed by attention to the poetic muse, the speaker brings the poem to a fairly inconclusive close by voicing the desire to 'Lie down and sleep.' Such a climax reveals a desire to relinquish the pursuit of inspiration (giving finality to this single text) perhaps, and yet also to enter the domain of dreams to seek new instructive visions. The whole poem might be described as dream-like in its avoidance of external reference, its visionary quality and close concern with the fantastical 'phantom' image. Its coming to a close with the speaker's wish to 'sleep' affords a degree of circularity to its import; the speaker sleeps to

dream anew, the text begins itself again and will never achieve finality except in the final dreamless 'sleep' of death. In a thematically similar sonnet of 1849, 'Two Pursuits' (*Works*, pp. 118-9), textual continuity rather than finality is overtly the concern of the poetry. The speaker interacts with two separate muses within the same work. The sonnet begins;

A voice said 'Follow, follow': and I rose
And followed far into the dreamy night ...

The speaker goes in impassioned pursuit of this vague image of the creative aspect of the self in the same way that the speaker chased the Fata Morgana in the poem of that name. But it rapidly becomes apparent that this first muse is a less than fruitful source of poetic inspiration;

It led me where the bluest water flows,
And would not let me drink ...
It left me wearied out with many woes.
Some time I sat as one bereft of sense:

The potential creative energy of the first 'voice' which gave urgency and substance to the initial section of the poem has been exhausted. In its ambivalent presentation, the muse of 'Two Pursuits' at this stage is akin in effect to the powerful and enigmatic figure of Moneta in Keats' *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, the 'tall shade veil'd in drooping white' which instructs the dreaming speaker;

Thou art a dreaming thing;
A fever of thyself - think of the earth;

What blissss even in hope is there for thee?
What haven? (33)

In 'Two Pursuits', as in *The Fall of Hyperion*, the poetic text rapidly finds itself in an identical state as that in which the speaker conceives of him/herself i.e. 'bereft of sense'. A new impulse is required to resuscitate the energy of the poetry;

But soon another voice from very far
Called 'Follow, follow': and I rose again...

The speaker (thus the lyric) begins again, its continuity guaranteed by the presence of this newfound inspirational energy which the speaker assures us, 'will not leave me till I shall go hence'.

'Echo' (*Works*, p. 314) is another deceptively simple poem which alludes to the association between the creative act and the world of dreams. The literal allusion is to the legend of Echo, who fell in love with Narcissus only to pine away with her lack of success in coping with his giant ego, till she had nothing left but a voice. On one level, then, the piece would seem to ask to be interpreted as a love-lyric whose speaker yearns for the company of a lover who is no longer present. In this respect, the poem is typical of Rossetti. The vocabulary used is characteristically simple, and yet the poem's elusive, vague qualities do, I think, counter the plausibility of the straight-forward biographically determined interpretation which some critics have preferred. Packer believes the verse to be addressed to William Bell Scott who - and this is only the most superficial of objections - can hardly have been said

to have had 'soft rounded cheeks' (he had a prominent beard) and even 'bright' eyes, judging from portraits of Scott, seems a little optimistic (34). A much more fruitful reading of 'Echo' may be produced if, akin to 'Fata Morgana' and yet from a different perspective, it is regarded, with all its subtle allusions, as a symbolically articulated invocation to the poetic muse.

Come to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

This forms a summons to the energies within the unconscious self - to 'memory, hope, love', those functions defying empirical measurement, to return 'in tears', coupled then with the emotional, feeling function of the inner self. The sense here is somewhat akin to that voiced by Wordsworth's maxim in his *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads* that poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity' (35). But the Rossetti text beckons further to inspirational energies which are imaged in the form of a vague, childlike (perhaps angelic) figure afforded no name, gender, nor external history. Like the 'Fata Morgana' muse-figure (and Keats' *Moneta*), the essence at the heart of 'Echo' is associated with 'sunlight', the light of positive, generative energy, and in a draft stanza of the poem included in the notebook manuscript in the Bodleian Library but omitted from the published version, the muse in 'Echo' is directly associated with utterance and articulation (as the *Fata Morgana* instilled 'song' into the verse);

Come with the voice whose musical low tone
My heart still hears tho' I must hear no more:
Come to me in my weakness left alone...

In the same manuscript version, the speaker's 'soul' is compared to 'a tired bird at close of day' whilst the addressed is conceived of as being an 'oasis' and 'Dearer than daylight'. It is clear that the speaker (thus the lyric itself) is frightened of being exhausted of song - then, as in the case of Echo, reduced by love to nothing but a voice, she would be *nothing*, not even having song. Consequently, the poet sends these words to the elusive - like an 'oasis' - source of poetic inspiration. From the point of view of one lacking in inspiration, the poem narrates a symbolic tale of what is is to have inspiration come to the self. The muse is imaged as absent and so the words of the poem, in fact the poem itself becomes talisman to the presence of creative energy. With a smart circularity reflected in the lyric's deliberately enigmatic title, 'Echo' (which enhances the verse even assuming no knowledge of the Echo myth), the poem becomes a monument to its own conception, a shrine to the unconscious motivations which it attempts dramatically to portray. Again, the inspirational impulse is closely associated with the realm of dreams. The speaker beckons;

Come in the speaking silence of a dream.

This emphasises the potential for articulation inherent in an alternative version of reality, the new frame of reference afforded by consultation of the dream experience, forbidden by the constraints of the rationality our waking life teaches us to honour. The dream sphere represents a

world of instinctive (thus unconscious) rather than conditioned (conscious) response. Coleridge recognised this important fact;

The language of the Dream/Night is contrary to that of Waking/the day. It is a language of Images and Sensations, the various dialects of which are far less different from each other, than the various Day-Languages of Nations. (36)

With this fundamental notion in mind, the second stanza of 'Echo' moves on to offer an image of the 'bitter sweet' dream itself;

O dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimfull of love abide and meet;
Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

This very concentrated passage expresses at once the desire and despair of the speaker, looking to the 'speaking silence' of the dream sphere for a harmonious union with the energy of inspiration addressed in the first stanza. The same effect may be found in the third sonnet of the *Monna Innominata* cycle (*Works*, pp. 58-64) which begins;

I dream of you to wake: would that I might
Dream of you and not wake but slumber on;
Nor find with dreams the dear companion gone ...

The speaker longs to remain in the realm of 'happy dreams' since the radiant presence of the soul-mate there 'makes day of night';

Thus only in a dream are we at one ...

Like the speaker of 'Echo', the 'Unnamed Lady' who provides the voice in the later sonnet sequence craves unity from her currently divided state. Again, this symbolic conjunction with the inspirational energy offered by the absent muse, may be found in the non-empirical world of the dream. But the qualifying tone of 'only in a dream' suggests that the harmonious state offered by the dream sphere is by no means an absolutely stable position, since the process of waking will ultimately render the unity a fleeting image and return the speaker to a state of division. 'I dream of you to wake' is the crucial admission made in the *Monna Innominata* sonnet, illustrating the Rossetti text's maintainance of notions of relativity in this investigation of the relationship between dreams and the creative act. The waking of the speaker is necessary if the contents of the dream are to be interpreted adequately and fully. Thus the speaker of *Monna Innominata* begs to 'slumber on', but cannot, and in describing the dream process sets herself outside it, finding the unity therein envisioned to be only a transient image, 'the dear companion gone'. Faced with the prospect that 'only in a dream we are at one' the disheartened sonnet speaker comes to a despairing conclusion, and one which contradicts the notion of death-as-dreamless-sleep which we encountered earlier (although even there it was challenged rather than passively accepted);

If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake,
To die were surely sweeter than to live,
Though there be nothing new beneath the sun.

Presented with the notion of the 'bitter sweet' nature of dreams - offering harmony which from an alternative perspective may not be so attractive - seemingly accepts a compromise. Dreams at least offer some salvation (only escapist in the sense that it is an escape into creativity), some vital opportunity for union with the spirit of inspiration, no matter how controversial this might appear in hindsight;

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death ...

The 'speaking silence of a dream' may bring the possibility of utterance to that which had hitherto been considered unutterable, new 'life' to that which had been thought 'cold in death'. 'In dreams' the speaker (and hence the lyric) may be instilled with new pulse, new breath; the premises of the 'bitter sweet' dream world are nevertheless accepted and the poem ends with implied communion between speaker and muse. The lyric has written itself.

Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low,
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

One might almost say that 'Echo' ends upon a note of satisfaction - a poem has written itself around the notion that no inspiration was at hand. But Christina Rossetti, we have noted, is always concerned with exploring all sides of an argument. 'Fata Morgana' demonstrated that the acceptance of poetic inspiration in terms of a frame of reference constructed around notions of 'dreaming' necessarily involved the

admittance that the self was split, that there were differing levels of being. 'Echo' dramatises the acceptance of the dream realm as a feasible alternative to everything else we have, since the possibilities offered there are better than 'silence' even if they be a dislocated version of our waking 'truths'. Silence to 'Echo' (the mythical figure and the poem) would be non-existence, since a voice is all she has - fitting the idea of the eternal for the poet being his/her power to sing as expressed by Keats' mortal nightingale/super-poet and its immutable song, and Yeats' golden bird of Byzantium that can only sing eternal songs to the dying, mortal world.

In direct contrast to the relieved acceptance of 'Echo', the appropriately titled 'Mirage' (*Works*, p. 350), composed in June 1860, conveys a sceptical and saddened view of the entry into the world of the dream in the search for inspiration.

The hope I dreamed of was a dream,
Was but a dream; and now I wake,
Exceeding comfortless, and worn, and old,
For a dream's sake.

Here is none of the bold persistence displayed in 'Echo', and the speaker's words are afforded added import by virtue of the fact of his/her speaking in hindsight. The pursuit of an empty dream has left only a sense of bitterness, and the poem's mid-section marks a relinquishment of the title and aspirations of poet on the part of the speaker;

I hang my harp upon a tree,

A weeping willow in a lake;
I hang my silenced harp there, wrung and snapt
For a dream's sake.

Yet the rhythm and repetition within the third and final stanza's opening couplet, which forces the verse relentlessly on, seem to go against the desire of the speaker to establish a state of inertia with a 'still' and 'silent heart'. With a much fiercer sense of irony than that subtly placed in the drama of 'Echo' here is a poem writing itself about the rejection of inspiration. It forms another perspective onto the same issue, imbued with the resentment that the pursuit of a dream sphere of reference has brought about the coincident revelation that the speaker's self is divided; 'Mirage' soberly and astutely puts forward the argument, needed alongside all the other notions concerning these models of reality, that dreams may leave us just as 'comfortless' as the waking world we look for escape from. And yet the whole tone of the poem, reinforced by the repeated line which closed each stanza, stress just how powerful a concept in the speaker's mind the notion of the dream has become. In however unsavoury a manner, the dream has provided the poet with his inspiration and the poem is testimony to this;

Life, and the world, and mine own self, are changed
For a dream's sake.

Christina Rossetti's description of the dream as a 'speaking silence' - donating the possibility of utterance to that hitherto unsaid - is perhaps at the heart of her concern with dreams as a poet. Forever exploring new frames of reference with which to express or challenge

ideas of poetic creativity, investigating areas of 'other-worldly' experience, the world of the dream is a prime sector for consideration. When silence can speak, new possibilities open up, what was thought dead may live again, meaning explodes. The speaker of a fascinating poem to be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this thesis, 'The Convent Threshold' (*Works*, pp. 340-2), after interpreting two fantastical dreams which she has experienced, remarks on the potential of the hidden meaning of dreams, their 'speaking silence';

For all night long I dreamed of you:
I woke and prayed against my will,
Then slept to dream of you again.
At length I rose and knelt and prayed.
I cannot write the words I said,
My words were slow, my tears were few;
But through the dark my silence spoke
Like thunder.

It is clear then that dreams are regarded with great respect in the poetry of Christina Rossetti. They offer new ways of interpreting the world, and thus new manners of utterance. The treatment of dreams in the poetry is by no means a settled constant: on the contrary, it is a shifting perspective itself which is always alert to, and stressful of the relativity of ideas. This notion of relativity is neatly conveyed in the overt attempt to narrate a dream vision which makes up the 1855 piece 'My Dream' (*Works*, pp. 315-6). Christina Rossetti herself writes in the margin of an 1875 edition of her poems that the episode was 'not a real dream' (*Works*, p. 479) and, indeed, this heavily symbolic poem has baffled many critics, who, like William Michael Rossetti, have been forced to conclude;

... As it was not a real dream, and she chose nevertheless to give it verbal form, one seeks for a meaning in it, and I for one cannot find any that bears development. (Works, p. 479)

At surface literal level the poem tells of a dream wherein the speaker finds him/herself standing 'beside Euphrates while it swelled'. The river begins to change hue and then suddenly from it come a 'crew' of infant crocodiles, rapidly increasing in stature, each wearing 'massive gold/And polished stones'. One regally attired crocodile grows larger than the rest, assumes dominance over the lesser creatures and manifests this newfound superiority by eating every single one of his fellow crocodiles in sight. The cannibalistic reptile then sleeps, dwindling 'to the common size' as he does so. A ship appears, sailing down the river, waking the crocodile who, at the sight of the 'winged vessel' repents, 'shed appropriate tears and wrung his hands'.

'What can it mean?' asks the speaker. Packer, of course, concludes that the majestic and gargantuan crocodile represents William Bell Scott - he so lately of the 'soft rounded cheeks' - and sees the poem as a desire for some sort of domination on Christina Rossetti's part (37). It is certainly a feat of the imagination of a league with the fantastical scenario of *Goblin Market* ('My Dream', not Packer's interpretation, although...), and no sources are known. William Michael Rossetti rightly praises the visionary qualities of the work;

If anything were needed to show the exceptional turn of mind of Christina Rossetti - the odd freakishness which flecked the extreme and almost excessive seriousness of her thought - the present poem might serve for the purpose. It looks like the narration of a true dream; and

nothing seems as if it could account for so eccentric a
train of notions, except that she in fact dreamed them.
And yet she did not... (Works, p. 479)

We know from the *Rossetti Papers* that the poem was more than likely
inspired by 'a drawing of various crocodiles ... by the French artist
Ernest Griset' (38). It is framed as a dream vision by the introductory
and concluding (but never conclusive) comments of the speaker, opening
in enigmatic fashion

Hear now a curious dream I dreamed last night,
Each word whereof is weighed and sifted truth.

A seemingly calculated and empirical sentiment resides here, eager to
assert the 'truth' of that which follows, though it is admittedly
'curious' and a 'dream'. The incidents recorded are later described as
'facts'. Far from being randomly generated (which we might expect from a
dream narrative), the images which follow are 'weighed and sifted',
carefully chosen and arranged, the means to an end.

I stood beside Euphrates while it swelled
Like overflowing Jordan in its youth.
It waxed and coloured sensibly to sight ...

The Nile of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in particular the
discussion of fertility and crocodiles aboard Pompey's galley which
Christina would have known in her 'deep... supreme' reverence for the
bard (Works p. lxx), seems influential here.

Antony: ... The higher Nilus swells,

The more it promises; as it ebbs, the seedsman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.

Lepidus: Y' have strange serpents there.

Antony: Ay, Lepidus.

Lepidus: Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your
mud by the operation of your sun: so is your crocodile...

...What manner o' thing is your crocodile?

Antony: It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as
broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is,
and moves with it [sic] own organs. It lives by that
which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it,
it transmigrates.

Lepidus: What colour is it of?

Antony: Of its own colour too.

Lepidus: 'Tis a strange serpent.

Antony: 'Tis so; and the tears of it are wet. (39)

'Humour, in its inner essence, she could enter into', William Michael reveals of his sister's 'intellectual' appreciation of Shakespeare (*Works* p. lxx). The passage would no doubt have appealed to Christina; indeed, its gently mocking tone itself is similar to that end-framing 'My Dream', as the speaker enigmatically refrains from disclosing the 'meaning' of her narrative. The river of Rossetti's poem, imaged in terms of another river 'in its youth', becomes the archetypal river of life; described in terms of actual physical response, 'sensibly to sight', it may represent the ongoing stream of conscious experience. The reptilian (dragon, serpent) is a recurrent image of fear of the primeval, with which we need to come to terms, thus an object of both fear and wonder.

Till out of myriad pregnant waves there welled

Young crocodiles, a gaunt blunt-featured crew,
Fresh-hatched perhaps and daubed with birthday dew.

From the depths of the flowing representation of consciousness is born the 'blunt-featured' mass of strange creatures; these present a suitably imposing image of the unconscious function, within and yet encroaching beyond the consciousness. The 'Young crocodiles' represent the birth of a dream. The speaker is indeed dreaming 'a curious dream' since the events narrated symbolically enact the workings of the dream process itself. The crocodiles are 'girt with massive gold' and there are many of them, marking the grains of embroidered narrative, largely incoherent 'newly born' to begin with which initiate the dream experience. And then comes the macabre vision of the kingly reptile devouring his kin, an aptly bizarre dream-image, the logic of which, like the crocodile 'knew no law, ... feared no binding law';

He batted on them, crunched, and sucked them in.
... ground them with inexorable jaw.
The luscious fat distilled upon his chin...

At one level of interpretation, this episode marks the symbolic portrayal of the most fiercely motivated part of the unconscious self gaining dominance over, and assimilating the potential of all other unconscious impulses. The dream gradually achieves a dominant theme (a theme, rather than a narrative's 'binding law') and the struggle relaxes, the lord and master crocodile sleeps.

This is where the poem shifts in tone and emphasis, alerting us to the fact that a new point is to be made, and this point would appear to have to do with the relativity of experience. The crocodile, who has represented the dream in symbolic terms thus far, himself sleeps and experiences a manner of dream visitation.

In sleep he dwindled to the common size,
And all the empire faded from his coat.
Then from far off a winged vessel came...
... white it was as an avenging ghost.

The other-worldly appearance of this 'avenging ghost', sailing down the river of consciousness may be taken as a new dream metaphor, suitably different in connotation to the crocodile symbol, arriving to lend a new perspective to the symbolic presentation recently established.

It levelled strong Euphrates in its course;
...seemed to tame the waters without force.

This new apparition brings calm to the conscious part of the self, undoubtedly troubled by the recent symbolic occurrences, and, just as notably, allows the dream image, the crocodile, to be viewed from a new vantage point;

The prudent crocodile rose on his feet,
And shed appropriate tears and wrung his hands.

What can it mean? you ask. I answer not
For meaning, but myself must echo, What?
And tell it as I saw it on the spot.

The poem tells, not, in the words of Henry James, 'in any literal vulgar way' but on a subtle symbolic register (40). Ever concerned with the relativity of meanings rather as much as with meaning itself - 'I answer not/For meaning...' - 'My Dream' is an example of the Rossetti text presenting in vivid images that which elsewhere its strategies constantly relate. We have aimed to show, thus far, that the early, and best, poetry of Christina Rossetti is involved in a constant, post-Romantic debate with itself as to the non-fixity of meaning and identity as expressed in poetic language. Rossetti's best known, and most admired piece, *Goblin Market*, by casting notions of sexuality and innocence into the ongoing equation. By doing so, the poetry takes up and extends the concerns we have already located in the Rossetti text, putting them to the further service of exposing the iniquity towards women of traditional poetic expression.

NOTES

1) Stoppard, T., *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (London; Faber, 1967) p. 44. This piece is discussed in Hume, Kathryn, *Fantasy And Mimesis* (London; Methuen, 1984) p. 126

2) Hume, Kathryn, *Fantasy & Mimesis* (London; Methuen, 1984) pp. 127-31

3) Rycroft, Charles, *The Innocence of Dreams* (London; Hogarth, 1979) p. 4

4) Shakespeare, Wm, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1980 rpt.) IV.1., p. 105

5) *Ibid* V.1., p. 107

6) *Ibid* V.1., p. 107

- 7) *Ibid* 'Introduction' by Stanley Wells, p. 34
- 8) *Ibid* V.i., p. 107
- 9) Eysenck H. J., *Sense & Nonsense in Psychology* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1963) p. 159
- 10) Welsh, Andrew, *Roots Of Lyric* (Princeton; University Press, 1978) p. 15
- 11) cited in Prescott, F. C., *The Poetic Mind* (New York; Cornell U. P., 1959) p. 44
- 12) Coleridge, Samuel T., *Notebooks* ed., K. Coburn, Vol II, (1804-8) (London; Routledge, 1962) 2086, 15.52, ff. 40-40v
- 13) Bald, R. C., 'Coleridge and *The Ancient Mariner*' in *Nineteenth Century Studies* (Ithaca, 1940) pp. 39-40
- 14) Coleridge, S. T., *Complete Poetical Works* ed. Coleridge, E. H. (Oxford; Clarendon, 1912) pp. 186-209, epigram p. 186.
- 15) *Ibid* pp. 295-8
- 16) Adair, Patricia M., *The Waking Dream: A Study of Coleridge's Poetry* (London; Edward Arnold, 1967) p. 7
- 17) Poulet, G., 'Timelessness and Romanticism' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* XV, (London, 1954) p. 41
- 18) Beguin, André, *L'Ame Romantique et le Rêve* (1937), passage translated in Thorlby, Anthony, ed., *The Romantic Movement* (London; Longmans, 1966) p. 45
- 19) Hartman, Geoffrey, *The Unmediated Vision* (New Haven; Yale U. P., 1954) p. 34
- 20) Rycroft, C., *The Innocence of Dreams* p. 4
- 21) Freud, Sigmund, *An Outline Of Psychoanalysis* (London; Hogarth, 1967) p.177
- 22) Keats, John, *The Poems of John Keats* ed. Allott, Miriam, (London; Longman, 1920) pp. 523-32
- 23) Shakespeare, Wm., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* IV, i, pp. 102-4
- 24) Breton, André, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Michigan; University Press, 1972) esp. 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)' pp. 1-49
- 25) Bowra, Sir Maurice, *The Romantic Imagination* (London; O. U. P., 1961 rpt.) p. 246
- 26) *Ibid* p.250

- 27) Rycroft, *The Innocence of Dreams* p.148
- 28) see Shakespeare, Wm., *Hamlet* (New York; New American Library, 1963) III, i, pp. 93-4 and Keats, John *Poems* ed. Allott, M., pp. 510-2
- 29) Shakespeare, Wm., *Hamlet* I, v, p. 64
- 30) see Edwards, Paul, 'Ambiguous Seductions; 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', *The Faerie Queene* and *Thomas the Rhymer*' in *Durham University Journal* (July 1990) pp. 199-203
- 31) Darwin, Charles, *The Descent Of Man* (London; Murray, 1871) p. 74
- 32) Eyesenk, H. J., *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* p. 159
- 33) Keats, John, *Poems* ed. Allott, M., pp. 655-85
- 34) Packer, *Christina Rossetti* pp. 90-1
- 35) Hartman, G. H., ed. *The Selected Poetry & Prose of Wordsworth* (London; Meridian, 1970) p. 423
- 36) Coleridge, S. T., *Notebooks* 6, 1.8
- 37) Packer, *Christina Rossetti* pp. 93-8
- 38) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *Rossetti Papers 1862-70* (London; Sands, 1903) p.67
- 39) Shakespeare, Wm., *Antony and Cleopatra* (New York; New American Library, 1963) II, vii, pp. 94-5
- 40) James, Henry, *The Turn Of The Screw* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1984) p.147

APPENDIX to Chapter 2

Published poems by Christina Rossetti referring to dreams and dreaming.
Page references are from *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti* ed. W. M. Rossetti (Macmillan: London, 1904).

p.3	<i>Goblin Market</i>
p.13	Three Nuns
p.18	The Lowest Room
p.20	From House to Home
p.26	<i>The Prince's Progress</i>
p.46	The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children ('Under the Rose')
p.55	A Ballad of Bodiny
p.59	<i>Monna Innominata</i>
p.64	An Old World Thicket
p.77	<i>Later Life</i>
p.99	The Dead City
p.104	Wishes
p.104	The Dream
p.105	Eleanor
p.109	Heart's Chill Between
p.111	The Lotus Eaters
p.118	Two Pursuits
p.132	Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims ('Now they desire ...')
p.153	There Remaineth Therefore A Rest For The People Of God
p.154	Sleep At Sea
p.180	Paradise
p.186	Now They Desire
p.192	The Heart Knoweth Its Own Bitterness
p.204	A Burden
p.288	Three Stages
p.290	Lady Montrevor
p.290	Song 'She sat and sang alway ...'
p.292	Dream Land
p.293	Looking Forward
p.294	Life Hidden
p.295	Sound Asleep
p.302	Song 'It is not for her even brow ...'
p.304	From The Antique
p.305	To What Purpose Is This Waste
p.308	What?
p.309	Two Parted
p.312	Dream Love
p.314	Echo
p.315	My Dream
p.327	The Hour And The Ghost
p.327	Light Love
p.330	In An Artist's Studio

p.330	Fata Morgana
p.332	Day Dreams
p.333	A Nightmare
p.333	For One Sake
p.338	Autumn
p.340	The Convent Threshold
p.350	Mirage
p.352	On The Wing
p.358	Life And Death
p.367	A Farm Walk
p.379	A Daughter Of Eve
p.382	Of My Life
p.388	Days Of Vanity
p.397	Yet A Little While
p.397	Today's Burden
p.401	Maiden May
p.402	Till Tomorrow
p.408	What's In A Name
p.417	Sleeping At Last
p.440	from <i>Sing-Song</i> ('I dreamt I caught a butterfly ...')

3. GOBLIN MARKET

She will be discovered
as meaning is flocking densely around the words
seeking a way
any way in between the gaps, like a fertilisation...
Denise Riley, *Marxism For Infants*

...its iterated jingle
Of sugar-baited words
Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market*

Goblin Market is Christina Rossetti's most widely read poem and the piece which, when published in 1862 rapidly established her reputation as a writer. Rightly, it has captured much critical attention, its many plausible levels of meaning leading to debate as to matters of poetic intentionality; a debate which, not unusually, has customarily been resolved by means of resorting to biographical-historical detail. That the poem is dedicated to Maria Francesca, Christina Rossetti's sister, and that Christina never married are all too easily taken to give historical justification for the work's sister protagonists and the undertow of sexual frustration which is felt in the piece. From this biographical standpoint has evolved the prominent strategy in attempts to unlock the meaning of the text of *Goblin Market*. As elsewhere in this thesis, I wish to pursue a more textual approach to the poetry, perceiving the poetic text as a structure capable of generating a plurality of readings of which autobiography is just one possible decoding (a reductive one at that). My own decoding (an encoding just the same) will fall into various stages. I will attempt to document the manner in which conception and publication of *Goblin Market* came about. Potential sources and influences of a work often held to be a spontaneous, original creation will be presented and evaluated before moving on to investigate in detail some textual strategies evinced by the language of *Goblin Market*, proposing that an understanding of these deep structures might provide an indication of the manner in which the dramatic formations of the poem may be read, symbolically, as extending and refining the subtextual implications of the poetry examined thus far in this study. I aim to provide a reading of *Goblin Market*, attempting to maintain a consistent emphasis on its language patterning and

symbolic import and the way in which these combine to develop the lexical strategies at work in the earliest lyrics Rossetti wrote, providing a sound platform from which later texts such as *The Prince's Progress* and *Monna Innominata* may be approached.

Inside a copy of the 1893 edition of *Goblin Market & Other Poems*, currently housed at the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, is written the following inscription, dated December 7, 1893;

'Goblin Market' first published in 1862 was written (subject of course to subsequent revision) as long ago as April 27, 1859, and in M.S. was inscribed to my dear only sister Maria Francesca... In the first instance I named it 'A Peep At The Goblins' in imitation of my cousin Mrs Bray's 'A Peep At The Pixies,' but my brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti substituted the greatly improved title as it now stands. And here I like to acknowledge the general indebtedness of my first and second volumes to his suggestive wit and revising hand.

Christina G. Rossetti

The Notebook Manuscript of *Goblin Market*, owned by Mrs. Geoffrey Dennis, is also dated April 27, 1859, by the author herself. These two citations constitute the only direct evidence by which the date of the poem's conception and writing may be gauged. Although W. M. Rossetti testifies to the fact that his sister's 'habits of composition were entirely of the casual and spontaneous kind, from her earliest to her latest years' (*Works*, p. lxviii), commentators have since doubted the plausibility of Christina Rossetti's (double) assurance that a poem of over five hundred and fifty lines' length could be wholly composed in one day. Professor D. M. R. Bentley's remarks exemplify this scepticism;

Is it not more likely that *Goblin Market* was composed over a considerable period of time, and that the April 27, 1859, in the Dennis Notebook is therefore arbitrary - the date of the poem's inception, perhaps, or the date on which it reached a sufficient state to warrant careful transcription?... (T)hough probably written largely in the spring of 1859, the poem may have been conceived earlier and completed later. (1)

Packer, also, seems unsure as to the accuracy of the poet's own chronology, proposing that 'a week or so' would have been the shortest possible time necessary for composition, and elsewhere forwarding 'March 21, 1859, to Dec, 31, 1860,' (2) as the period calculated as adequate for the work's genesis. It is ironic (I hope to show why very shortly) that *Goblin Market* should promote such uncertainty - its author's own testimony regarded as less than a certitude - even as to the matter of its chronological formation. The circumstances surrounding its history after Notebook transcription are, at least, a little clearer;

I saw (Alexander) Macmillan last night, who has been congratulated by some of his contributors on having got a poet at last in your person... He is envious to see something else of yours, and is a man to judge for himself... I told him of the poem (John) Ruskin has, and he would like to see it if it does not go into Cornhill. (3)

The writer here is Dante Gabriel Rossetti; the recipient of the note is his younger sister, Christina. The poem which is the subject of the correspondence is *Goblin Market*, which was to become 'perhaps the best known and most admired of (Christina Rossetti's) poems' (4). The work is first mentioned in a postscript to another letter of Dante Gabriel's, this time to William Michael Rossetti on January 18th 1861;

I asked (John) Ruskin whether he would say a good word for something of Christina's to the Cornhill, and he promised to do so if she liked. If so, would she send me by book-post the book containing the poem about the two Girls and the Goblins? (5)

The Cornhill magazine, first published in January 1860, and edited by William Makepeace Thackeray, was a much respected publication. Ruskin, however, did not wholly approve of the poems, including *Goblin Market*, which he received from Gabriel.

They are full of beauty and power. But no publisher - I am deeply grieved to know this - would take them, so full are they of quaintnesses and other offences. Irregular measure (introduced, to my great regret, in its chief wilfulness by Coleridge)... is the calamity of modern poetry... (Y)our sister should exercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public likes. Then if she puts in her observation and passion all will become precious. But she must have the Form first... (6)

Undiscouraged by Ruskin's criticisms, which he considered 'most senseless' (7), Dante Gabriel continued in his attempts to have his sister's work published (the collection printed privately on the 'Polidori' press by Christina's grandfather in 1847 was the only published material of the poet's hitherto available). He proposed to send *Goblin Market* to Mrs. Gaskell, 'who is good natured and appreciative and might get it into the Cornhill' (8), and also to his Irish friend, the writer William Allingham (of whom, more later). It appears that the assistance of these two literary figures was never needed, however, since the aforementioned Alexander Macmillan soon stepped in to become Christina Rossetti's publisher. *Macmillan's Magazine* had been running as

from November 1859; 'Up-hill' (*Works*, p. 339) was published in the February 1861 edition, 'A Birthday' (*Works*, p. 335) in the April issue, and 'An Apple Gathering' (*Works*, pp. 335-6) appeared in August. Macmillan, confessing to having been 'congratulated by some of his contributors' at having discovered a new writing talent, then writes to Dante Gabriel Rossetti on October 28th 1861;

I was hoping to have seen you... to talk about
your sister's poems. I quite think a selection
of them would have a chance - or to put it more truly
that with some omissions they might do. At least I
would run the risk of a small edition, with the
two designs which you kindly offer...
The attraction of the volume would be the *Goblin*
Market... (9)

The printing of *Goblin Market & Other Poems* began at Macmillan & Co. in London in January of 1862, and the volume was published in March of that year.

In his work *A Survey Of English Literature (1830-1880)* (1920) Dr. O. Elton calls *Goblin Market* 'a fairy tale... It is pure invention, and not of the popular stock,' (10) whilst D.M. Stuart, in the biographical/critical work, *Christina Rossetti* (1930), refers to the same poem as 'an act of pure imaginative creation' (11). Both of these judgements are quite obviously at odds with Christina Rossetti's own admission, quoted earlier, that the work stands 'in imitation of my cousin Mrs Bray's 'A Peep At The Pixies'', though a browse through that volume suggests that little more than the working title and general setting were borrowed (12). The poem certainly strikes one as a piece

abundant with imaginative nuance and potency, but there are certainly possible sources other than the one Rossetti herself confesses to in her inscription of 1893. B. Ifor Evans, whilst hailing *Goblin Market* as 'the most original of Christina Rossetti's compositions', provides a list of potential influences (13). He compares the poem to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* (though surely 'Christabel' is the more obvious input) in respect to the elusivity of any fixed reference and meaning patterns (one recalls W.M. Rossetti's note that 'Among modern English poets... perhaps Coleridge... stood highest in her esteem' (*Works*, p. lxx)): Evans also suggests a borrowing of atmosphere (but not of plot, as with the Coleridge text presumably) from Thomas Keightley's *The Fairy Mythology* (14), further citing the *Arabian Nights*, which text we know that Christina 'liked... heartily' when young, as influential (*Works*, p. xlix). All of these reference points are remarkably non-specific, it must be noted, and if indeed they are formative inputs to *Goblin Market*, they can be said to do little more than colour the tone and timbre of the story. A possible source, and one which Evans, surprisingly, pursues very unenthusiastically, which deserves more specific attention lies in the form of a short poem by the Irish poet William Allingham, composed in 1849, entitled 'The Fairies' (15). Allingham was a firm friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti; there are many references to Christina's eldest brother, and one lengthy description of his character in Allingham's diaries. In 1854 Gabriel designed the proposed colour cover of Allingham's *Day And Night Songs* (the design was not used but is preserved in the British Museum) and in March of the same year Allingham came to London for four months;

Immediately upon coming to London he was at work for Household Words, The Athenaeum, and various reviews.

He walked and dined almost daily with (Dante Gabriel) Rossetti, and gave him, certainly, one sitting for his portrait; but this was probably never finished... During these months, also he saw a great deal of (Arthur) Clough, of old Mr. and Mrs. Rossetti, and of Christina Rossetti. (16)

This allows ample opportunity for Christina Rossetti to have been exposed to the Irishman's work, 'The Fairies', written five years earlier (at Killybegs in January 1849, according to Allingham's diary). Maureen Duffy, in *The Erotic World Of Faery*, also detects this link;

(William) Allingham may... have been responsible for Goblin Market. His poem, The Fairies 'Up The Airy Mountain' remarkably anticipates... the plot of the goblins of the later poem. Christina Rossetti must have known it through his friendship with her brother. (17)

There are striking similarities between the Irishman's work and *Goblin Market*. Allingham's poem (directed specifically at children, whilst Rossetti's was not) begins with the octave stanza;

Up the airy mountain,
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a hunting,
For fear of little men,
Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together,
Green jacket, red cap,
And white owl's feather!

This form is more than echoed throughout *Goblin Market*, often near directly;

'Come buy,' call the goblins
Hobbling down the glen.
'Oh,' cried Lizzie, 'Laura, Laura,
You should not peep at goblin men.'...

Down the glen tramp little men...

Backwards up the mossy glen
Turned and trooped the goblin men...

Should not loiter in the glen
In the haunts of goblin men.

... the herds
That used to tramp along the glen,
In groups or single,
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

She never spied the goblin men
Hawking their fruits along the glen...

Beside the brook, along the glen,
She heard the tramp of goblin men...

For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men...

Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked quaint fruit-merchant men...

The 'glen/men' rhyme - which constitutes the first rhyme of Allingham's poem in a stanza repeated at the end of the work, thus framing it emphatically - becomes something of a motif (among others) in the Rossetti text, punctuating and modulating the progression of the narrative. Within the parameters of the discourse of (children's) folklore narration, it is not unlikely that a 'glen/little men/goblin men' rhyming conjunction might appear sooner or later. Fairy stories are notable for the peculiarity, and hence the selectiveness of their register, but the similarity in verbal coupling between Allingham's and Rossetti's approach is, I think, reinforced by the ominous tone, partly due to the relentlessly iambic rhythms which appear whenever the

'glen/men' connection is made. The atmosphere of Allingham's poem, his world of 'black mountain-lake' men who 'live on crispy pancakes/of yellow-tide foam' with 'frogs for their watchdogs', also foreshadows that of Rossetti's goblin realm in its wierd quirkiness. Allingham's poem, much more than Rossetti's, relies upon atmosphere at the expense of dynamism of plot; indeed, the earlier work, especially in its painfully brief description of the mystical, druid-like 'Northern King', comes across as an insipid tract, even as regards the reading capabilities and attention span of its intended infant audience. It is notable, then, that the most absorbing segment of 'The Fairies' - a brief embedded narrative - finds its mirrored counterpart in Rossetti's more mature version of the same twilight, fairy world. Allingham's text informs us that the 'little men';

... stole little Bridget
For seven years long;
When she came down again
Her friends were all gone.

They took her lightly back
Between the night and morrow;
They thought that she was fast asleep,
But she was dead with sorrow.
They have kept her ever since
Deep within the lake,
On a bed of flag-leaves,
Watching till she wake.

By the craggy hillside,
Through the mosses bare,
They have planted thorn trees...

This episode appears more than to inform Lizzie's 'wise upbraidings' to her sister in *Goblin Market*. The name of the tragic victim is altered from Bridget to Jeanie, but the scenario is otherwise familiar;

Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the noonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow...

The similarities here are arresting. The differences at many levels elsewhere in the two works make it feasible to proffer Allingham's poem as no more than provider of the germ of an idea around which the atmosphere of Rossetti's tale is woven, but if a source (other than that admitted by Christina Rossetti herself) is to be cited for *Goblin Market*, then, it appears, 'The Fairies' must be given serious consideration (more weight certainly than Evans chooses to allow the poem).

II

Although, as I have stated already, *Goblin Market* was not intended specifically for a non-adult audience, Elton is correct in calling the work 'a fairy tale' (see n. 10). Rossetti's production of a mature work

of child-like fantasy, her decision to frame the text in terms of fairy lore and yet direct the fable at an adult readership, is itself an indication of a desire to re-address and hence reassess a literary tradition. The decision to address her fantastical narrative to an adult readership tells us something of a (former) role of the fairy tale which *Goblin Market*, at one level, attempts to resurrect. Marie-Louise von Franz has spoken of this function;

Until about the seventeenth century, it was the adult population that was interested in fairy tales. Their allocation to the nursery is a later development, which probably has to do with the rejection of the irrational, and the development of the rational, outlook - so that they came to be regarded as nonsense and old wives' tales and good enough for children. (18)

But the dominant ideology which had dogmatically condemned fairy tales to imprisonment in the nursery (and, notably, only allowed them probation in the company of female 'old wives' whose tenure is equal to 'nonsense' anyway) was forged upon a male dominated subjectivity. Writing as a woman, Rossetti constructs *Goblin Market* along (adult) fairy tale lines in an attempt to expose the partiality of the phallogentric judgement outlined by von Franz, and re-establish the potential for articulation still alive within a form of writing held by men to be irrational nonsense, fit only for infants and women - thereby, an inferior code. At the end of *Goblin Market*, Laura and Lizzie's history remains in the possession of woman only now as a happy victory and not as a compromised defeat. On one level, the poem opens with a description of the perpetual passive listening process 'maids' must perform when faced with a male articulation. No choice is outlined;

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry...

Evening by evening
Among the brookside rushes,
Laura bowed her head to hear,
Lizzie veiled her blushes...

The passive hearing act, as described here, is a submissive, embarrassing - one feels, almost degrading - affair, a retreat from activity or natural expression. The goblin men are singers of song - troubador poets of a sort - whose rhyming (literally) expresses a desire to hold the girls captive. And the sisters, in the poem's first seduction, have been tempted into, initially, desiring this subjugation. But by the end of *Goblin Market*, the girls' situation has changed. The time of their hardship at the hands of 'little men' is 'not-returning time' and, in the presence of 'children of their own' indicative of an ongoing harmony, the text can re-establish itself - having unfolded around uncertainty of conclusion in the main narrative - as having reclaimed woman's right to self-expression in having subverted the phallogocentric ideology represented throughout by the goblin men. The scene also recalls an image of the oral tradition of storytelling, again a more natural mode of expression than male traditions of writing with their attached conventions and rules.

Laura would call the little ones
And tell them of her early prime,
Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time...
Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,
And win the fiery antidote...

The sister directly referred to here is Lizzie, yet on another level it might be the text of *Goblin Market* itself (the history of her self, thus existentially all that she has become), unresolved for so long, in 'deadly peril' because uncertain as to direction, and finally an 'antidote' to unquestioned male tradition which has the female as 'other' in its 'fiery' re-establishment of the wholesomeness of feminine experience. This redirection, I hope to stress throughout the course of this analysis, is achieved not through an aggressive reversal of male-oriented ideology (since this would be as sinister and subversive as the masculine coding which banished fairy tales from the canon of 'serious' literature in the first place) but through an interweaving of textual strategies, operating at many levels, which combine to illustrate the danger of promoting one reading at the expense of alternatives, finally advertising the need for plurality of textual interpretation, as does so much of Rossetti's writing.

The adoption of the fairy tale mode has further notable implications where the poetic strategy of *Goblin Market* is concerned. As noted previously, as a literary idiom the folk-tale mode is a highly self reflexive register, acutely drawn toward awareness of its own limits as a discourse. It is a code which, traditionally, chooses to adopt repeated motifs and devices rather than promote particular, historical instances. *Goblin Market* does not wholly banish these conventions. For instance, the sisters inhabit an ahistorical setting, allowed no specific geographical location. The feministic independence which this affords them is further embroidered into the discussion of their daily routine, which is an existence couched in the least specific of pastoral terms;

Early in the morning
When the first cock crowed his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
Aired and set right to the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
Talked as modest maidens should...

It is with the acceptance - not an idle acceptance, but a considered employment - of this stock manner of visualising the world of the 'modest maidens' that the strength of *Goblin Market* as a treatise emerges. An aggressive anti-phallogentric text would do more than quaintly ironise the phrase 'modest maidens', but Rossetti is content to disturb such ideological ordering in a more subdued fashion, where the whole text functions as a critique of its components. Again, the outright rejection of this predetermined coding would have been as one-sided a statement as the male condemnation of the fairy story itself. *Goblin Market* works with and within the set register of the fairy tale to construct its own textual strategy at other levels. This subtler approach reinforces the import of the poem. Wendy Mulford, in an essay titled 'Notes On Writing' has stated of women's literature;

Yes, we must break through our silence. But we cannot create a language. We can make a lexical selection, designed to exclude, for example, the obvious phallic metaphors of penetration, thrust etc., for forceful action, for energy and desire. Such a lexical pruning and substitution of new items... is part of the process of thinking our language, realising its subtle articulations of male dominance, making some redress and calling the feminine into presence in verbs quantifiers, substantives and pronouns. (19)

It is from the energies of this type of motivation that the text of *Goblin Market* proceeds, with, it must be noted, at least one qualification. The Rossetti text - indeed, the whole of Christina Rossetti's poetic output - functions not least at a level which is strongly symbolic. Because of this, the 'lexical pruning' Mulford urges becomes, in *Goblin Market*, a highly delicate and complex affair. The awareness of the plurality of readings offered by the positing of a signifier outwith its specific parole (and all other paroles) necessitates a tolerance of one loaded metaphoric thrust in the sure belief that other readings (though neglected by the masculine ideology whose bias the text seeks to illuminate) are equally permissible at symbolic level. Simply, then, for *Goblin Market*, or any text, to deliberately erase all words, images, symbols which carry potential 'sexist' (anti-woman, woman as other) readings, would be to submit to - to bow and hear, as Laura initially does - rather than to overcome phallogocentric ideology masquerading as neutral truth. Such naive 'pruning' forms an acknowledgement of the power which a tradition of writing exercises, rather than a straight attack upon the premises supporting that tradition. In fact, *Goblin Market* abounds with stock descriptive devices, as it attempts to reconstruct a feminine mode of expression from raw materials stamped with male prepossession.

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtained bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings.

This is how the sleeping sisters are described in their bed after Laura has returned from her experiences with the merchant men. The progressive quartet of similes afford visually diverse images of the girls linked thematically by a desire to express purity (and yet the 'curtained bed' also offers a tantalising concealment of events). The images are traditional articulations - cooing birds, delicate blooms, snow, ivory, - of essential purity; the most striking thing (certainly of the first three) about these similes is their unoriginality. They are stock images, unaltered versions of a manner of description characteristic of the fairy tale. But in this text, their employment may be read as unsettling. The first objection is a major one; the girls are described, if we read in a traditional way, as pure whereas, within the terms of the poem, Laura is no longer pure at all. Secondly, the girls are not differentiated - 'Like two... Like two... Like two... Like two...' - whilst the text up to this point has been occupied with articulating their differences. Furthermore, the building up of similes, a device used five times in the course of the poem, implies a consolidation, a reinforcement of the same idea, but simultaneously reveals contradictions at another level. The images are linked smoothly if we accept conventional readings which unite them under the name of purity. However, visually, there are further dimensions to each image which do not coincide and so reduce the effect of sequential reinforcement. The idea of 'two blossoms' (and we read 'white' by a process of conditioned response) may be akin visually to 'two flakes of... snow' but the image which follows, one which smacks of biblical (thus traditional, mythic) iconography.

Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings...

This image introduces a deliberately jarring effect into the visual chain. The notion of 'ivory' may hint at a theme of purity, but the picture is extended into an obviously phallic arena - 'wands of ivory/Tipped with gold' - immediately reinforced by the proposition of male as tyrant - 'for awful kings'. Underwriting notions of specific signification, the text here disturbs any potential for complacent assimilation of the sequence of similes. A traditional interpretation of the four layers of reference (one which presupposes thematic unity) concludes that the notion of absolute purity is being offered in recognisable folklorish terms. But that signified here is not absolute purity, but contradiction (Lizzie is as she was, Laura has fallen) and that can only be discerned from the group of images if we look further than the traditional reading process may encourage us to delve. Laura and Lizzie are sisters, together here, yet also apart in the terms in which the text has cast them asunder. Symbolically mirroring this ambiguity, the language of the above passage begs to be interpreted at two different levels - one level which sees it as an internally complementing medium, the other which sees it as marking out difference. Such a strategy, exposing the limited vision of a tradition by manoeuvring within the very confines of that tradition, stretching its presumptions into areas which highlight the contradictions within the coding.

This concern to redirect tradition from within is substantially furthered in *Goblin Market's* treatment of sexuality and eroticism, prominent themes of the poem, where, again one finds the text unashamedly exploiting paradigms (sometimes literally) loaded with phallogentric resonance. Once more, the argument is subtly wrought and conducted at the level of language and symbol. Once more, the use of the fairy tale form is supremely relevant. Stephen Prickett, in *Victorian Fantasy*, observes that fairy stories 'offer a surrogate language of sexuality' (20). The potential for this exercise, involving as it does in *Goblin Market* a subversion of patriarchal values, arises in part from the mythic resonance of the fairy tale mode, its capacity to 'reduce... mythical themes to more human proportions' (21). A text such as *Goblin Market*, considering the freedom to arrange archetypes anew which the production of an original fairy tale bestows, is able consciously to disturb a symbolic order we accept as neutral. Just as the language of Rossetti's poem functions to disturb certainty of reference in its use of simile, the discussion of sexuality within the text is one which examines complacency in its deconstruction of the way sexuality and eroticism is typically portrayed.

It has been said of *Goblin Market* that 'much of the imagery is unmistakably and openly sexual' (22): this reckoning should, I think, be regarded as a prefatory remark rather than a conclusion. To state that a term is 'unmistakeably... openly sexual' implies that there is a settled view, predetermined by men no doubt, as to what is sexual and what is not. It is precisely this manner of preconception that the text of *Goblin Market* sets out to deconstruct and expose as ideology disguised

as truth. The story of Laura and Lizzie is a fable, fitting a standard definition of that term;

FABLE n. tale; legend; short story with moral,
esp. one with talking animals as characters. (23)

Further to this, *Goblin Market* is a fable of temptation, of temptation succumbed to and of temptation overcome. But the concern of the text with matters of temptation does not simply end at this narrative level. An integral function of the poem is to illustrate how a text may tempt an unwitting reader into the blinkered acceptance of one interpretation of a code at the expense of other readings which may be just as plausible, relevant and (perhaps more) fruitful. It is, I think, highly satisfying, then, to remember just how many times critical opinion has been tempted and seduced, by a poem telling of the danger of being tempted and seduced, into pigeonholing its many layers of meaning into one narrow compartment. *Goblin Market* has been read separately as allegorical, sexual, orthodox Christian, feminist, social, pornographic, artistic and psychological in import (24). Recently, with the application of critical methods less panic-stricken towards the production of one consummate meaning, critics have been able to avoid temptation a little more gracefully. Jeanie Watson (perhaps her forename made her less eager to succumb to *Goblin Market's* snares) in a recent study has rightly recognised that the work, rather than demanding unilateral explanation, deserves 'perception and participation in (its) whole vision' (25). So, whilst it may be fair enough to say that

...Laura's 'fall', with its luscious pleasures

and bitter aftertaste can be well enough understood
in sexual terms (26)

such a pronouncement must be weighed up against the patterning, symbolic and moralistic, offered by the text of *Goblin Market* as a whole. The poem begs for plurality of response as much here as anywhere else, being not chary of employment of loaded terminology along the way. This is the first description we have of the sisters as the goblins pass by. Laura and Lizzie are pictured

Crouching close together
In the cooling weather,
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
'Lie close,' Laura said,
Pricking up her golden head:
'We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?'

The picture of innocence? At one level, that is surely all that this passage purports to be. And yet the language brims, even this early in the poem, with a sensuousness which is suggestive to the point of salaciousness. 'Close together... clasping... tingling... Pricking... fruits... hungry thirsty roots'. This register exploits exactly the gap between innocence and loss of virtue which the text goes on to narrate. There is nothing inherent in this collection of words that should make one read them as prurient, or pornographic in import; any such interpretation relies upon the supply of such references from a value laden register brought to *Goblin Market* from a predetermined tradition of reading. Language itself has experienced the fall from an innocent state, long

before *Goblin Market* comes to describe Laura's fate at the hands of temptation. 'Sweet tooth' Laura's fall, indeed the whole text of *Goblin Market*, serves ironically to illustrate a potential return to an untouched state for language, or at least an understanding of how language might illustrate its own potentialities. In an 'iterated jingle/Of sugar-baited words', again and again the language of the poem functions to tempt one reading (sexual, conditioned) over and above potential others, a constant reminder of how bias in signification becomes insidiously naturalised within discourse. The goblin men function as a fractured unit, 'Signalling each other' yet diversely described, to preface these increasingly intensifying passages as the girl gives submits further;

(Laura) sucked their fruit globes fair or red.
Sweeter than honey from the rock,
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flowed that juice;
She never tasted such before,
How should it cloy with length of use?
She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
She sucked until her lips were sore...
And knew not was it night or day
As she turned home alone.

In the act of sustaining this highly sensuous atmosphere, the terminology cannot but fail fully to assume its erotic dimension; the description of Laura abandoning herself to sensuousness becomes simultaneously sensual - its potentially accurate metaphoric signification of an act of oral sex led to *Playboy* magazine's reprinting of the poem, complete with 'salacious illustrations' (27). This careful assimilation of provocative, loaded terms, from the overtly phallic

'fruit globes fair or red' to the rhythmic, unpunctuated repetition of 'sucked and sucked and sucked', lures one into the certainty that one interpretation of this incident, the sexual reading, must unquestionably be the right one. But this is not so and, just as Laura leaves the scene knowing 'not was it night or day', the text here resides inside the same suspended, twilight state by illustrating how the elevation of one reading as authoritative leaves other potential signifieds behind, relegating the text to a kind of limbo realm of painful inaction. This is patently not the ultimate function of *Goblin Market* as a text premised upon those energies I outlined earlier, yet it is a temporary step along the road to resurrection of language. Laura's fall can hardly avoid, imaged as it is, a sexually connotative interpretation. Lizzie's actions, her sacrifice later in the poem, lead to the employment of a similar register as that used to narrate Laura's abandonment to sensuality. Lizzie returns;

She cried, 'Laura,' up the garden,
'Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices...
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men.'

This language is as loaded with sexual connotation as that of the previous passage cited. Laura's orgasmic response, 'as one possessed', links the two passages by syntactic, rhythmic association;

She clung about her sister,

Kissed and kissed and kissed her...

Lizzie's exit from the scene is expressed in the same manner as was Laura's departure;

In a smart, ache, tingle,
Lizzie went her way;
Knew not was it night or day...

But this portion of the text is founded upon acts of pure charity and loving kindness. Laura's fall bespoke lust; Lizzie's intercourse with her sister here is not a lesbian, sexual act, but one of pure love prefaced by an act of supreme charity and selflessness. That the text returns to the same language code which so suggestively related Laura's fate with the goblins at a later point in the narrative where suggestiveness is far from appropriate, encourages further the hypothesis that the poem is deconstructing its own codes, illustrating the inadequacies of the language (as handed down by unsubverted male tradition) with which the poet is trying to write anew. *Goblin Market* utilises the same language register at two conflicting points in the course of the narrative in order to illustrate how reductive a process it is to allocate one set of signifieds alone to a code, at the expense of neutrality of reference. This, in the area of sexuality and thus 'a sure hook for academic readers', is the poem's bluntest way of divulging a concern prevalent throughout the text (28). The language tempts one toward the certainty of one reading only to follow this seduction with the embarrassing revelation that such 'sugar-baited' offering of supposed certainty of interpretation is wholly inefficient for a complete understanding of the

poem. Thus the effectiveness of the innuendo attached to Jeanie's fate at one point in the tale;

(Lizzie) thought of Jeanie in her grave,
Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died
In her gay prime,
In earliest winter time...

This passage, with its provocative 'for joys brides hope to have', essentially purports to be a clue as to the import of the rest of the poem. It confers a heavily sexual implication upon Jeanie's fate, insinuating physical loss of virginity if we read its innuendo in traditional terms. Yet we know what happened to Jeanie already. Lizzie herself told of the girl's exploits with the goblins some hundred and fifty lines previously.

Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruit and wore their flowers
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the moonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low...

This episode can be read as comfortably as can Laura's intercourse with the goblins as symbolic of a sexual encounter. It is a fall from innocence with dreadful consequences (placed in the narrative as an

embedded fiction, a warning to inhabitants of the main sequence of events) directly, predictably foreshadowing Laura's fate. But exclusively to succumb to the sexual suggestiveness here is to deny the alternative directives placed elsewhere in the story - to agree to the tempting, but immensely reductive proposition that the symbolic function of the goblin men and their fruits is to be of a sexual nature. Such an estimation of the strategy of *Goblin Market* is neatly deconstructed by the later, highly direct challenge that Jeanie

...should have been a bride;
But... for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died...

This constitutes a statement at odds with the rest of the poem's tender. This very plain, matter of fact estimation of Jeanie's history underwrites the gradually constructed intentionality of the symbolic textures introduced into *Goblin Market* long before this piece and continued as a strategy long after. No consistent degree of symbolic motivation is possible if pronouncements like this are to intrude upon the foundations of such a manner of communication. Complacency of interpretation is again disturbed.

Thus far, I have attempted to show how - in a fashion similar to, yet more sustained than that evident in many of Rossetti's poems - the text of *Goblin Market* disturbs notions of complacency where the reading process is concerned. By simultaneously inviting and subverting a set (phallogentric) symbolic order, thereby exposing the ideological bias upholding such an order, the work throws attention onto the fact that language is not a transparent medium reflecting some pre-ordered sense of 'reality' elsewhere, but constitutes that 'reality' itself. In the Romantic sense, *Goblin Market* is a self-conscious, self reflexive text, continually investigating the premises of its own stance as poetry; in a post-Romantic sense, the work's supreme, ultimate concern is overtly to do with the structure and ordering of language itself. By repeatedly sparring and fencing with our notions of what language ought and ought not to do, *Goblin Market* gradually wears down prejudices we hold through accepting ideology as if it were neutral truth. The capability inherent in the nature of the fairy-tale form, as I indicated earlier, is particularly suited to this exercise; *Goblin Market*, written as a fairy story, a mode for some time outlawed by male tradition, marks the championing of an alternative tradition of writing where the text, at various levels, may fantasise a shattering attack upon the received symbolic order. Such fantastic literature is free from 'realistic' constraints and utilises this freedom to articulate the struggle against the context, literary and social, within which it will be determined. Again, it is absolutely no coincidence that Rossetti, writing as woman, produces a fairy tale. Marginal to male tradition, fantastical literature offers itself to the female creative instinct as an 'appropriate medium for suggesting a sense of estrangement, of alienation from 'natural' origins' (29). *Goblin*

Market is, then, not an exercise in escapism, but a striving towards expression. The critique of language offered by the poem stems from this desire. This investigation may be prefaced by a discussion of sexuality and tradition, since these are matters arising out of language, but the final thrust of *Goblin Market's* argument inevitably centres upon language itself. With this in mind (and after avoiding their call for so long) I wish finally to examine the function of the goblin men and their fruit as far as the strategy of *Goblin Market* as defined above is concerned.

The poem's title, *Goblin Market*, in more than just the obvious way, is important as a starting point here. It may be read as something of an oxymoronic construction, juxtaposing the 'goblin' image, that of something primitive, animal of instinct, outwith man's law and untethered to rules of worldly logic, with the concept of a 'market', an idea formulated from man's law-making, a system of ordered commercial interchange. It is from an appraisal of this implied fusion of primitivism and materialism in the poem's title that the work's symbolic treatment of language may be gauged. Roderick McGillis makes a highly pertinent remark when he observes of the piece, 'What the goblins are selling is language' (30). In the world constructed by the text of Rossetti's poem, as it is introduced to us, it is the 'goblin men' who offer language at its most colourful and opaque (in fact, at its most deceptive), and therefore at its most obvious as a medium, and the 'modest maidens' who must barter with the sprites in 'market' terms. The linguistic register the goblins hawk is attractive and alluring; it is meant to be so, since we can only know the fruits they sell by their

descriptions of them. Language writes the world the fiction of the poem creates, just as language writes the world for us, and the goblins' language is of a singular variety.

Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries...

The rhythmic '-berries' repetition here is as mouthwatering as the fruits it names, and the settling of the metre, from the odd, arresting irregularities of line length initially into a regular repeated pattern beginning at 'Swart-headed mulberries...' constitutes further a hypnotic, enticing incantation. The goblins are advertisers; they put language together, unit by unit, in order to create a commercially attractive proposition. A brilliantly ambiguous line outlines the quality of the named fruits, and thus describes the language which constitutes/constructs the fruits;

Sweet to tongue and sound to eye...

If 'to tongue' and 'to eye' are infinitives here, then the goblins are talking about the fruits as objects. However, if 'tongue' and 'eye' are nouns prefaced by the 'to' preposition, then this phrase alerts us to how

the goblins are operating their strategy at another level. The fruits are 'sweet to tongue' as linguistic structures (and 'sound' becomes a noun, not an adjective now) and 'sound to eye' - that is, they are sound-constructs in appearance, they are made up of language and that language, forming them, is their essence. We are now firmly talking about language; that is what the goblins are vending. Laura and Lizzie are the recipients of this discourse, and the awareness of its visual (language creating the vision) impact is stressed in the text;

'We must not look...
You should not peep at goblin men.'
Lizzie covered up her eyes,
Covered close lest they should look...

But 'Curious Laura' does look, does hear, is tempted. The manner of signification, rich and diverse and colourful, touted by the goblins is a new and appealing manner of expression to behold. It seems to free language in its difference from the norm, just as the diversity of appearance of the merchant men is appealing in its non-conformity to uniform standards.

One had a cat's face,
One whisked a tail,
One tramped at a rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.

These disparate forms are as attractive in their difference from uniformity as is the language they offer. In *Portrait Of A Lady*, T. S. Eliot's narrator muses;

And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression . . . dance, dance
Like a dancing bear,
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape... (31)

These various positions, differing manners of articulation, perhaps through their diversity alone, seem to offer potential for new, untraditionally received expression to the speaker here. Likewise, Laura is convinced that the male goblin code, seemingly diverse and free from customary speech patterns, will allow new expression.

The whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste
In tones as smooth as honey,
The cat-faced purr'd,
The rat-paced spoke a word
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
One parrot-voiced and jolly
Cried 'Pretty Goblin' still for 'Pretty Polly';
One whistled like a bird.

This passage is important in alerting us to just what the code which the goblins sell implies. The diverse appearance of the merchants ought, by simple projection, to indicate potential for pluralistic expression. In fact, this is not the case. They purr and whistle, communicating nothing but self-gratifying sound patterns, and the 'parrot-voiced' cries an unnaturally reflexive 'Pretty Goblin'. What the goblins offer is a perversion of language, just as naturalised male traditions of writing are perversions of neutrality. The goblins are tricksters because they parade mutated language codes in order to deceive others into participating in their games - their sweet words are, truly, 'sugar-baited'. Simultaneously, and more essentially, the goblins attempt commercially to purvey something natural which ought to be freely

accessible to anyone; they load words with value as if it were their right to do so. And the values are deceptive, as one critic has noted;

The verbal stream at the beginning of *(Goblin Market)* is, of course, a lie. Instead of freeing language and releasing passion, the goblin words fix, enclose, suspend, and exhaust those who listen to them with eager curiosity. (32)

Laura has no 'money' which is the currency the goblin men seek. However, trading 'a precious golden lock', she attempts commerce with them, partaking in the codes they offer - she ventures innocently, naturally to participate in the 'male' goblin pre-arranged vision and discourse. Predictably, the results are disastrous. Laura sought a new manner of expression in the attractiveness of the goblin code; through unpreparedly entering into the male sphere she loses the power of articulation. She becomes silent.

She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
But peered through the dimness, nought discerning...
So crept to bed, and lay
Silent till Lizzie slept;
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept
As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,
Laura kept watch in vain
In sullen silence of exceeding pain.

The goblins, the men in this fairyland, have successfully silenced the female who desired to employ their ways as if they were natural to herself. Lizzie's approach is a different one, less impulsive and more calculated.

(Lizzie) put a silver penny in her purse,
Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with lumps of furze
At twilight, halted by the brook:
And for the first time in her life
Began to listen and look.

'For the first time in her life,' Lizzie is about to involve herself with the quest for expression. She is successful where Laura failed because she meets the goblins on their terms, with 'a silver penny in her purse'. Unlike Laura, who had no a priori knowledge of the implications of the discourse she entered, Lizzie is forewarned and subverts the male creed from within, by manipulating its own stipulated terms of contract;

'Good folk,' said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
'Give me much and many:'
Held out her apron,
Tossed them her penny.

Lizzie has, in fact, two things with her which show her already preparing for and coming to terms with the workings of the commercial coding she is hoping to overcome - her 'silver penny', and the remembrance of Jeanie. Unlike Laura who 'spoke in haste' with her 'last restraint...gone', Lizzie boldly and directly attacks the right to supremacy of the goblin law. She now occupies the position of barterer, rapidly reversing the power relationship inscribed within the goblins' code as we have hitherto witnessed it in operation. She takes control of the register swiftly and incisively;

'So without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and many,
Give me back my silver penny

I tossed you for a fee.'

Faced with this usurper of their code, the goblins resort to physical assault. The empty, half-realised nature of their discourse, which seemed so attractive before, 'Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking...' is all their commercially loaded system of language is reduced to, once someone has questioned, as Lizzie has, the relevance of its values. Lizzie's entry into discourse with the goblins is, notably, simultaneous with a relinquishment of the passivity of old. She will utilise the male logos on her own controlling terms, but will not (as did Laura) be an idle receptacle for their register;

Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laughed at heart...

When Lizzie (whose feminine traits are stressed during the struggle more than once 'her gown... her stocking...Like a lily') has worn out the men, and their exit from the poem (literally and symbolically) is predictable confirmation of how their code has faltered.

At last the evil people,
Worn out by her resistance,
Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit
Along whichever road they took,
Not leaving root or stone or shoot...

The 'penny', a symbol of Lizzie's assimilation of and attack upon the goblin men's patriarchal code, is returned to the girl;

(Lizzie) heard her penny jingle
Bouncing in her purse,-
Its bounce was music to her ear.

The penny gives the gift of expression (it sings music, literally and symbolises the defeat of the men) to Lizzie, and consequently back to Laura. The goblin men, meanwhile, must kick away 'their fruit' which is symbol of their trade, thus their discourse; we never hear the male voice again in the poem. As woman, Lizzie has pointed out that the male 'goblin' code is just that - a code - which can be underwritten, employed by a non-goblin voice, this exercise functioning to cancel out any claim to supremacy which the male discourse might stake. So, by the end of the poem, with Laura's recovery, discourse is reclaimed from the snatches of subversive ideology masquerading as truth (the goblins were masqueraders) and shown potentially to be neutral once more. Woman now can write her history;

Laura would call her little ones
And tell them of her early prime,
Those pleasant days long gone
Of not returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood...

In narrating her story, Laura uses the fairy tale mode, the poem's reclaimed discourse perpetuating itself yet further. But the text which has continually warned against complacency is not fully done. The ending, which many commentators have complained about as being idle dogma and an unneeded closure device, in terms alien to the rest of the

work offers one interpretation of a poem which has advocated plurality of response;

'For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.'

Of course, politically this may function as a statement of feminism, but it has another reading. Language has been reclaimed by women in the course of *Goblin Market*; Laura's closing remarks show that, in placing one dogmatic interpretation on the history she is re-narrating, the possibility for complacency exists just as much in feminine discourse as it did in patriarchal ideology. The struggle goes on, as the poem ends on a note of complacency obviously at odds with its strategy as a whole work.

Goblin Market is a highly important, original and provocative text. In its story of the sisters and the goblins it colourfully and symbolically dramatises the struggle it simultaneously encounters and negotiates at linguistic level. Literally and symbolically, the work offers the overcoming of the temptation set up by male ordained patterns of discourse and the reclamation of signifying potential back to the condition of neutrality, thus freeing language. The displacement of signification embodied in the poem's use of simile and treatment of sexuality shows the struggle within language being played out meta-textually beneath the fairy tale narrative overlay. Like many of

Rossetti's texts, *Goblin Market* portrays and refines its philosophical concerns through its images and plot, visibly deconstructing the tradition of writing within which it will be placed, thus establishing potential for a new, untraditional tradition to be born. With this in mind, we shall now examine the title poem of Christina Rossetti's second major collection, *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866). Ironically a work which interrupted the flood of consistently warm critical reception Rossetti's published poetry had brought forth, *The Prince's Progress* marks a harnessing of the textual and symbolic strategies we have seen at work in the poet's early writing, offering an intertextual investigation of poetic tradition, and the anti-female conventions of quest narrative in particular, and lyric poetry in general.

NOTES

- 1) Bentley, D. M. R., 'The Meretricious & The Meritorious in *Goblin Market*: A Conjecture & An Analysis' in Kent, ed. *The Achievement Of Christina Rossetti* pp. 57-81 quotation p. 59
- 2) Packer, *Christina Rossetti* p.421, n.17
- 3) Doughty, O., and Wahl, J. R., ed., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York; O. U. P., 1965) vol. II, p. 389
- 4) Battiscombe, Georgina, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (London; Constable, 1981) p. 161
- 5) Doughty and Wahl ed., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* vol II p. 389

- 6) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *Ruskin; Rossetti; Pre-Raphaelitism* (London; George Allan, 1899) pp. 258-59
- 7) Doughty and Wahl ed., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* p. 389
- 8) *Ibid* p. 389
- 9) Macmillan, George A., ed., *Letters of Alexander Macmillan* (London; Macmillan, 1908) pp. 94-5
- 10) Elton, O., *A Survey of English Literature (1830-80)* (London, 1920) II p. 23
- 11) Stuart, D. M. *Christina Rossetti* (London; Macmillan, 1930) p. 78
- 12) The work referred to is Mrs A. E. Bray (Stothard), *A Peep at the Pixies, or Legends of the West* (London; Grant and Griffith, 1854). The book is an flat and uninspiring 'survey' of British pixies, their habits and habitations. The title appears to be the only real aspect of Mrs Bray's work which Christina Rossetti considered emulating.
- 13) Evans, B. Ifor, 'The Sources of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*' in *Modern Language Review* (28) (Cambridge; University Press, 1933) pp. 156-65
- 14) Keightley, Thomas, *Fairy Mythology* 2. vols (London; 1828)
- 15) Allingham, W., *The Fairies* (London; Thos. de la Rue 1883)
- 16) Allingham, W., *A Diary* ed. H. Allingham & D. Radford (London; Macmillan, 1907) p. 72
- 17) Duffy, M., *The Erotic World Of Faery* (St. Albans; Panther, 1974) p. 276
- 18) Franz, Marie L. *Problems Of The Feminine In Fairytales* (Texas; Spring, 1972) p. 1
- 19) Mulford, W., 'Notes On Writing' in Michelene Wandor ed. *On Gender & Writing* (London; Pandora, 1983) p. 34
- 20) Prickett, S. *Victorian Fantasy* (Sussex; Harvester, 1979) p. 103
- 21) Chetwynd, T. *A Dictionary Of Symbols* (London; Paladin, 1982) p. 147
- 22) Prickett, S., *Victorian Fantasy* p. 105
- 23) *New Gem Dictionary* (London; Collins, 1960 rpt.) p. 186
- 24) see McGillis R., 'Simple Surfaces: Christina Rossetti's Work for Children' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* p. 209 footnote ii

- 25) Watson, J., "'Men Sell Not Such in Any Town': Christina Rossetti's Goblin Fruit of Fairy Tale" in *Children's Literature* 12 (1984) pp. 61-77, quotation p. 73
- 26) Prickett, S., *Victorian Fantasy* p. 106
- 27) see Bentley, 'The Meretricious and the Meritorious' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* p. 57 footnote 1
- 28) McGillis, R., 'Simple Surfaces' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* p. 209
- 29) Jackson, R., *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (London; Methuen, 1981) p. 103
- 30) McGillis, R., 'Simple Surfaces' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* p. 209
- 31) Eliot, T.S., *Collected Poems* (London; Faber, 1936) p. 20
- 32) McGillis, R., 'Simple Surfaces' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* p. 217

4. THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS

Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me
in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.

Schiller (*The Piccolomini IID*)

See how the subtle elements balance each other, and
fuse into a noble conglom!

Christina Rossetti, letter to D. G. Rossetti

I

In his editorial 'Notes' to *The Poetical Works Of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, published in 1904, William Michael Rossetti claims of *The Prince's Progress* (*Works*, pp. 26-35) that;

The original nucleus of this poem is the dirge-song of its close - 'Too late for love, too late for joy,' etc. This was written in 1861 and entitled 'The Prince who arrived too late.' When Christina Rossetti was looking up, in 1865, the material for a fresh poetical volume, it was, I believe, my brother who suggested to her to turn the dirge into a narrative poem of some length. She adopted the suggestion. (*Works*, p. 461)

This would date the initial conception of the text of *The Prince's Progress* as it stands in the final published version as being sometime 'in 1865'. Such a claim is, I would suggest, erroneous. The above statements closely recall another note of William Michael Rossetti's, published a year earlier in the 1903 edition of the *Rossetti Papers* (1862-70), appertaining to a letter of Christina Rossetti to her other brother, the keen critic and encourager of her work Dante Gabriel, in which the composition of *The Prince's Progress* is discussed, notably the characters of the Alchemist and the hero Prince. William Michael prefaces the letter thus;

The reference to 'my Alchemist' and 'The Prince' applies to her other poem *The Prince's Progress*. It was Dante Gabriel who got her to turn a brief dirge-song which she had written into that longish

narrative, as a pièce de resistance for a new volume. (1)

The letter referred to is not of 1865 (the earliest date one could expect on the evidence of William Michael's above cited dates), but was written from Hastings on 23rd December 1864. Its contents affirm that, by this point in time, the idea of the Prince's narrative is already a well established notion in the minds of both writer and recipient;

My dear Gabriel... True, O Brother, my Alchemist still shivers in the blank of mere possibility; but I have so far overcome my feelings and disregarded my nerves to unloose the Prince, so that wrapping paper may no longer bar his progress. (2)

The actual writing of *The Prince's Progress*, if not already underway, must have begun soon after this point. In another letter from Hastings, that of 16th January 1865, Christina Rossetti closes by saying;

This morning out came the Prince, but the Alchemist makes himself scarce, and I must bide his time. (3)

William Michael Rossetti deduces, I think accurately, that these informed comments;

... must mean that Christina had now composed some portion of *The Prince's Progress* relating to the Prince himself, but not that portion in which the Alchemist figures. (4)

At any rate, as early as 30th January 1865 Dante Gabriel Rossetti is returning 'annotated' drafts of the poem to his sister at Hastings, and the Alchemist episode is freshly completed and ready for his approval;

81, High Street, Hastings
30th January 1865

My dear Gabriel, - Here at last is an Alchemist reeking from the crucible. He dovetails properly into his niche. Please read him if you have the energy: then, when you return him to me, I must give a thorough look-over to the annotated *Prince*... (5)

Christina Rossetti came back to London from Hastings at the beginning of April 1865. In February Dante Gabriel had already designed and sent to her the illustrations for the published edition of the poem, and in March *The Prince's Progress* is being discussed as a completed work in letters from Hastings:

81, High Street, Hastings
6th March 1865

My dear Gabriel - ...I readily grant that my *Prince* lacks the special felicity (!) of my *Goblins*: yet I am glad to believe you consider with me it is not unworthy of publication. (6)

One must conclude that the whole of the *Prince's* narrative was written and completed between December 1864 and April 1865, whilst Christina Rossetti was officially resting at Hastings after tuberculosis had been diagnosed. Any suggestion of Dante Gabriel's to 'turn the dirge into a narrative poem of some length' must, then, have been made in 1864 before Christina left for the Sussex coast. It was possibly made as early as May 1864, at which point, William Michael Rossetti states, Dante Gabriel

was already 'urging his Sister to prepare a new volume'. This comment prefaces a letter of 7th May 1864 included in the *Rossetti Papers*, the tone and content of which indicates that Christina Rossetti had by then received much 'brotherly' encouragement, advice and assistance towards the production of a second volume of poetry:

My dear Gabriel, - Don't think me a perfect weathercock. But why rush before the public with an immature volume? I really think of not communicating with Mac[millan and Co., [publishers] at present, but waiting the requisite number of months (or years as the case may be) until I have a sufficiency of quality as well as quantity. Is not this after all my best plan? If meanwhile my things become *remains*, that need be no bugbear to scare me into premature publicity. Not that the brotherly trouble you have already taken need be lost, as your work will of course avail when (and if) the day of publication comes -
Your grateful affectionate bore
Christina G. Rossetti (7)

Involved in the 'work' and 'brotherly trouble', Dante Gabriel's suggestion that an epic-poem might be made out of the 1861 'Too late for love' lyric must have been proffered before December 1864, and not 'in 1865' as William Michael Rossetti claims.

Temporal matters aside, the William Michael's relation of Dante Gabriel's proposal is, in the two instances he describes it, an important starting point in an analysis of *The Prince's Progress*. Firstly, to re-quote the *Rossetti Papers*;

It was Dante Gabriel who got her to turn a brief dirge-song which she had written into that longish narrative...

And then in the *Poetical Works* where the 'Too late for love' song is named as being 'the original nucleus' of the final text of *The Prince's Progress*.

...it was, I believe, my brother who suggested
to her to turn the dirge into a narrative poem
of some length. She adopted the suggestion.

'She *modified* the suggestion' would be fairer - certainly if the proposal had been forwarded to her in terms of William Michael's descriptions. For it must be asked to just how great an extent the final 1866 text of *The Prince's Progress* evinces an attempt to 'turn the dirge into a narrative poem of some length.' After all, the song which concludes *The Prince's Progress* is a virtually unaltered form of the short lyric written five years previously and published as a complete single work in *Macmillan's Magazine* in May 1863. To this degree, *The Prince's Progress* neither demands nor indicates *internal* remanagement of the original dirge-song: it is not restructured nor remade into a narrative, but remains essentially unaltered itself as a song now prefixed by a narrative. The lyric makes sense in terms of (and directly comments upon) that narrative, but importantly isn't itself narrativised. It can be seen that this construction of a narrative affording a specific context to a poem written some years earlier places Christina Rossetti into an interesting position in relation to her own poetical work.

Significant here are the uncharacteristically forceful objections Christina Rossetti makes to another suggestion from the ever attentive Dante Gabriel, that a 'tournament' scene might prove a healthy addition

to the narrative of *The Prince's Progress* which was to preface the 'Too late for love' song. Clearly viewing this proposal as an intrusion upon the schema of the work at hand, Christina Rossetti writes from Hastings on 10th February 1865:

My dear Gabriel ... How shall I express my sentiments about the terrible tournament? Not a phrase to be relied upon, not a correct knowledge of the subject, not the faintest impulse of inspiration incites me to the tilt ... You see, were you next to propose my writing a classic epic in quantitative hexameters or in the hendecasyllables which might trip up Tennyson, what could I do? Only what I feel inclined to do in the present instance - plead goodwill but inability ... Also (but this you may score as the blind partiality of a parent) my actual *Prince* seems to me invested with a certain artistic congruity of construction not lightly to be despised: 1st, a prelude and outset; 2nd, an alluring milkmaid; 3rd, a trial of barren boredom; 4th, the social element again; 5th, barren boredom in a more uncompromising form; 6th, a wind-up and conclusion. See how the subtle elements balance each other and fuse into a noble conglom! (8)

Comments such as these clearly indicate that in the construction of the *Prince's* narrative Christina Rossetti is thinking directly about her own methods of poetic composition, examining and questioning her creative powers. The manufacture of a narrative story to preface and explicate the 'Too late for love' lyric puts her into the position of interpreter and critic of her own work, and, as a result of this, she simultaneously becomes involved in an examination of her own *methods* of writing. Attempts to define and analyse her own 'system' of poetic production can be found in many of Christina Rossetti's letters approaching and coincident with the period in which the main narrative of *The Prince's*

Progress was written. On 1st December 1863, finding inspiration lacking but deadlines beckoning, she writes to her publisher, Alexander Macmillan;

... if one conviction can go beyond another,
I am yet more firmly convinced that my system
of not writing against the grain is the
right one, at any rate as concerns myself. (9)

This 'system' of writing is directly referred to in two letters from Hastings at the time of the composition of *The Prince's Progress*. The central episode of the Alchemist proved troublesome in the construction of the story, but when the section was finally written Christina Rossetti writes on 30th January 1865:

My dear Gabriel - ... Here at last is an
Alchemist ... He's not precisely the Alchemist
I prefigured, but thus he came and thus he
must stay: you know my system of work. (10)

Two months later another reference to this 'system of work' appears in the correspondence between Christina and Dante Gabriel. This Hastings letter is itself undated but William Michael Rossetti places it as being of March 1865. Part of its content deals with Dante Gabriel's 'tournament' suggestion: 'Not the faintest impulse of inspiration incites me to the tilt, the poetess had objected on 10th February 1865 and now urged once more 'to the tilt' she argues:

I do seriously question whether I possess
the working power with which you credit me;
and whether all the painstaking at my command
would result in work better than - in fact

half so good as - what I have actually done
on the other system. (11)

Prompted by 'not the faintest impulse of inspiration', the idea of a tournament is evidently offensive to this 'other system', a concept which, though left vague here and never defined elsewhere, is in this context to be judged as antithetical to notions of 'working power' and 'painstaking'. (Quite apart from the fact that the inclusion of a tournament would involve embracing a narrative convention in a poem which seeks to subvert conventional modes. Dante Gabriel is missing the point.) The 'system' would seem to owe some sense of its prefigurement to notions of poetic inspiration and artistic creation and their relationship to laboriously contrived literary endeavour. Cast in the role of interpreter of her own verse - in the construction of a narrative which would justify the terms of the original lament - one detects a move on the poet's part towards a further investigation of the methods and processes involved in the formulation of a poetic text.

The elegy which concludes *The Prince's Progress* - the last six stanzas of the final 1866 version - first appears as a self-contained work in the manuscript notebook now in the British Library. The poem is dated 11th October 1861 and titled 'The Prince Who Arrived Too Late'. It next appears with virtually no amendment published as a single short lyric in *Macmillan's Magazine*, VIII, May 1863, there titled 'THE FAIRY PRINCE WHO ARRIVED TOO LATE'. Taken as a complete single work from the pen of Christina Rossetti, the lyric is characteristically vague in areas of import and external reference. The 'princess' is named as such only once

and even then the placing of the nomination directly after, in fact as partner to an obviously metaphorical construction leaves the certainty of its reference open to debate:

The enchanted dove upon her branch
Died without a mate;
The enchanted princess in her tower
Slept, died behind the grate. (*Works*, p. 34)

But the title of the piece as published separately, along with later references to the 'crown' the maiden wears and her being 'Meet queen for any kingly king', make a consistent and coherent reading of the lyric as a traditionally elegaic lament over a dead princess immediately plausible and justifiable. The poem was composed in the same period as the longish, semi-political narrative 'A Royal Princess' (*Works*, pp. 35-8), written on 22nd October 1861 according to the Manuscript Notebook, which shows Rossetti occupied with the notion of an unhappy princess at this time - the disillusioned royal in the latter poem is also related to the dove metaphor, remarking 'Me, poor dove that must not coo'. Some of the descriptiveness in the short lyric seems to owe its tone to 'Is And Was' (*Works*, p. 300), written in 1850, or perhaps 'Listening' (*Works*, p. 313), a poem of 1854 which makes the 'dove' image into an extended simile. Furthermore, despite the rejection of the Arthurian jousting tournament, the poem inhabits another Arthurian convention in a definite sense - that of the maiden, Elaine or the Lady of Shallot, dying in the tower. There are echoes of Coleridge's 'Christabel' (as there were in *Goblin Market*) in the poem's often sinister atmosphere, and Keats' 'La Belle Dame' and 'Isabella' are certainly recalled. Another influence would

seem to be Tennyson's 'Mariana' (published in 1830, the year of Christina Rossetti's birth), itself a suggestive, rather than a specific lyric. The image of the distraught, weeping woman isolated in the 'moated grange', with its darkly Shakesperian echoes, whose lover will not come seems an obvious source of inspiration for *The Prince's Progress* in general. The language of Rossetti's lyric directly draws from another Tennyson piece, the maid's song from the book of Guinivere (1859) in the *Idylls Of The King*, published as a separate poem in 1859.

Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late! too late! ye cannot enter now... (12)

This song, in turn, is a relation of the parable of the ten virgins in *Matthew, 25*. This would be well known to Christina Rossetti but it appears that she favoured, considering the reversal of the plot (in the Biblical story, the 'bridegroom' is Christ and it is the virgins who are too late for the 'marriage') she works in her own poem, the language of the piece over and above the religious parable.

5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered
and slept.

6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the
bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. (*Matthew, 25*)

Whatever its sources, the 'Too late for love' song communicates coherently at literal level; similarly the Prince's narrative also communicates adequately at the level of surface meaning as the description of a sequence of events whose consequence supports the most

obvious reading of the lyric it prefaces. On that plain fictive narrative level the Prince, 'Strong of limb if of purpose weak' gradually surmounts the various distractions and obstacles along his route, reaching his goal, the 'enchanted princess' alas 'too late for joy', her death having preceded his arrival. These occurrences construct a perspective from which the lyric can be approached, giving the song a voice (literally in the form of the 'veiled figures' that chant the dirge at the close of *The Prince's Progress*, but also metaphorically) and specifying a reading of the vague funeral lament which otherwise could have only been speculatively inferred from the short, suggestive lyric alone.

The Prince's narrative draws heavily upon the traditional discourses of fairytale and quest myth. The predicament of the hero prince as he journeys towards the sleeping maiden openly recalls the tale of *The Sleeping Beauty* and, like *Goblin Market*, works well enough as a simple moral tract. But a careful examination of *The Prince's Progress* makes it clear that, however well it works as a straightforward tale, there are peculiarities in the imagery, language and structure of the poem which, in a manner typical of Rossetti's writings, suggest that perhaps more than a surface reading is possible. Christina Rossetti herself makes implicit this possibility in a letter to Dante Gabriel from Hastings on 3rd March 1865 where she says of *The Prince's Progress*:

I think that the plot is now obvious to mean
capacities without further development or addition. (13)

In the same letter, she goes on to argue against Dante Gabriel's objection to the use of the word 'aftermath' in stanza 47, saying of the term:

... I think it gives a subtle hint (by symbol)
that any more delays may swamp the Prince's
last chance. In the same way... 'Now the moon's
at full' seems to me happily suggestive of
the Prince's character. Of course I don't expect
the general public to catch these refined clues:
but there they are for minds such as mine.

Comments like these - 'a subtle hint... seems to me... suggestive of' - denote an authorial awareness that the poetic text is capable of working on more than one level: the narrative level of 'plot' is held to be 'obvious' whilst beyond this plane lies the 'refined' level of 'symbol'. This proposal forms a basic premise for a fuller reading of the great majority of the Christina Rossetti's poetry, and *The Prince's Progress* in particular. A coherent and consistent reading of the work is easily achieved on the narrative level, but such a reading may only be partial: a more thorough interpretation involves a delving beneath the surface, a recognition that a secondary communication is effected by the text at the level of symbol. Thus the 'full moon' becomes not just the full moon, but a symbol of fecundity, the Mother-of-all: the questing Prince is not any Prince of history but may be read as an emblem of the 'strong' masculine conscious ego, and his prospective partner may symbolise the feminine unconscious function - the 'veiled bride' as she is called in the text. All of these archetypes are familiar to the register of the fairy tale, the form Rossetti had already reinvented to her own ends in *Goblin Market*, where temporal and spatial dislodging (the events of *The*

Prince's Progress, like those of *Goblin Market*, are never specifically located in time nor in space) afford an eternal quality to the import of the text and encourage reading at symbolic, non-empirical level. A recent commentator has noted that

...much of Christina Rossetti's poetry reflects
an acute sensitivity to the duality of experience... (14)

Christina Rossetti's awareness of the differing levels of import of her work, has already been alluded to in this study, and I would propose that a text such as *The Prince's Progress* provides further evidence of the desire to investigate accepted binary modes of opposition in language. This poetry operates around a system of dualisms, where the probing of immediate notions of differentiation invites the reader beyond the surface nominal to consider deeper symbolic import. A central feature of *The Prince's Progress* is its concern with Alchemy, but on one level the episode of the Alchemist itself is only the epitome of a consistently presented theme - the separation of various elemental aspects of existence (often into active and passive ingredients) and a consequent investigation of the relationship that binds yet keeps the two signified as separates. Reality and dreaming, innocence and its loss, waking and sleeping, living and dying, sinking and swimming, day and night, the Prince and the princess are all analysed as components towards a potential unity on the symbolic plane. The precision of binary patterns of imagery is deliberately dislodged: this can be seen in the application, in the course of the text, of the colours red and white. White may signify essential purity, but also sterility and death; but

which reading are we to accept of the 'white room' in which the maiden waits, or at the end of the poem when of her it is said:

We think her white brows often ached
Beneath her crown. (*Works* p. 35)

Similarly, red may imply sin, but also has connotations of vitality and passion. In the final stanza, the Prince is told:

Let these be poppies that we strew,
Your roses are too red... (*Ibid*)

The colour imagery here specifically encourages plurality of interpretation. In a manner akin to that prevalent in *Goblin Market*, this repeated denial of complacency at surface narrative level explicitly invites a deeper production of meaning at the level of symbol.

The concern with duality and ambivalence at every level in *The Prince's Progress* begs that we be sensitive to its implicit, as well as explicit suggestiveness. Another feature of the poem which suggests that more than a surface reading may be possible appears in the highlighting of the quest aspect of the Prince's part in the story. The change of title from 'The Fairy Prince Who Arrived Too Late' (1863) to *The Prince's Progress* (1866) indicates a marked shift in emphasis from the conclusion of the journey to the journey itself. The third stanza of the poem begins:

In his world-end palace the strong Prince sat,
Taking his ease on cushion and mat,

Close at hand lay his staff and hat. (*Ibid*, p. 26))

The introduction of the character of the 'strong Prince' in the narrative is coincident with the unambiguous statement of his purpose - the 'staff' and 'hat', traditional materials of the quest, simply and precisely noted. From then on the poem moves through a series of trials the prince must undergo, cataloguing an episodic maturation of the 'youth'. The trials may be seen as a series of symbolic rebirths, each of which affords to the Prince a potentially new level of awareness, highlighting consecutive stages in his own development and in the development of the quest. In a traditional quest epic, this would be the case but it is crucial to an understanding of *The Prince's Progress* to note that Christina Rossetti's Prince is a singularly bad, or at best unreliable, interpreter of signs and situations. His incorrect reading of the situations he encounters brings about his failure and the princess's downfall.

Whether the Prince assesses them adequately or otherwise, the fact that the episodic rhythms of the narrative are to be read on a symbolic level is conveyed especially well in the conclusion to the encounter with the Alchemist. A death is left behind, in the form of the old 'atony':

Thus the dead man stayed in his grave,
Self-chosen, the dead man in his cave... (*Ibid*, p. 30)

Simultaneously, the Prince, allowed this vision of mortality, emerges from the dark cave - a symbolic rebirth - with the 'Elixir of Life', that

which he has gained from this particular trial. Not for the first time, however, the Prince fails to learn from his experiences and the Elixir is never put empirically to use nor tested in the subsequent narrative of the poem.

Peculiarities such as these - the highlighting of the quest and its patterns and the part they play in the story, and the special emphasis placed upon symbolic features in the poem - would seem to support Christina Rossetti's own intimated awareness that the text might communicate meaning on more than simply the narrative level. I would suggest, furthermore, that these features establish, along with the literal, a richly psychological frame of reference for the work, related to a wish (similar to that governing *Goblin Market*) to reassess myths and their sometimes ambiguous psychological implications: an appreciation of this facet of the text is crucial to a full reading.

Folk tales are instinct with psychological symbolism. One modern commentator has noted

Applying the psychological model of the human personality, fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the pre-conscious and the unconscious mind. (15)

Marie Louise von Franz, the student of Jung quoted in the previous chapter, has done much work in this field, offering readings of traditional tales, expressed in Jungian and post-Jungian terms, confirming the view that fairy tales

convey at the same time overt and covert meanings... speaking simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult. (16)

Structured around a hierarchy of patterned symbols, fairy tales may be directly related to what are held to be the unconscious areas of the self. Never specifically located in time nor space, these legends are able with ease to assume a dream-like, eternal register, their figures and events not chained to overtly causal procedures, the offspring of the imagination rather than of any factual rationale. Most frequently following, as did the tale of Laura, Lizzie and the goblin men, the traditionally comic progression - from order through chaos to order reestablished and seen to be of a more permanent nature - fairy tales often end in a marriage, which may assert symbolically the achievement or restoration of harmony in the psyche. In the tale of *The Sleeping Beauty* (one of the most obvious influences upon *The Prince's Progress*) the slumbering maiden may be read as representative of the feminine part of the psyche, the feeling, emotional side of the self, so broadly speaking the Unconscious mind. She is pricked to sleep by the (phallic) spinning wheel needle - an offending because too forceful an assertion of the masculine element, attempting a mode of aggressive dominance over the feminine but merely succeeding in becoming the extinguisher of Beauty through negative animus influence. The maiden sleeps, and the castle also sleeps while it becomes surrounded by thorns - the psyche becomes barren and stagnant - meaning that the sleeping girl, symbol of the unconscious, is obscured, repressed and in danger of becoming lost forever. In this respect, the masculine, conscious aspect of the self

must now assert itself in an attempt to redeem the fading unconscious area or it, too, is condemned to stagnation and extinction, as the deaths of the early crusaders in the tale illustrate. Finally the right questing male appears and his essential union with the princess, along with their happiness thereafter, may symbolise the restoration of harmony in the psyche.

This does not happen in Rossetti's poem. Rather, she repeatedly reinvestigates the ritual figures and procedures which, long cut off from their mythic origins, had become set archetypes, and she improvises the plot of the romance to make it relevant to her own desires. The text borrows heavily from the discourses of fairy lore and quest myth, employing archetypes familiar to those forms - the questing hero, the sleeping maiden, the Alchemist, the phases of the moon and so on. Yet, as with *Goblin Market*, none of these devices are transplanted idly from the lore from whence they came. All are remanaged and manipulated in the course of Rossetti's poem to reconstruct a new, and notably more open-ended myth. *The Prince's Progress* concludes not in a pleasant marriage and the prospect of new life, but in a death and a song. The psychological implications of this reinvention of fairy tale patterns, coupled with the highlighting of the quest aspect of the story, constitute a typically post-Romantic internalised quest in the tradition of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Keats' 'La Belle Dame' and *The Fall of Hyperion*, and Shelley's *Alastor* where a surface narrative may also embody symbolic patterns portraying a psychological landscape and relating to ideas of identity and the self.

Significantly, by operating around the principles defined in Romantic poetry in this area, Rossetti still positively allows the more sensitive and subtle male perspectives of poetic tradition to guide her own poetry as it seeks to subvert other areas of that tradition. That particular species of quest articulated in *The Prince's Progress* is one which may be identified as Romantically demonic in so far as the subject goal of the crusade is eventually and sadly disclosed as being (superficially) delusive. But this has the result of encouraging an evaluation of voyage as more than equal to destination (the shift in emphasis from arrival to journey in the poem's title change). Hence the enshrinement of the resultant sense of loss - preserved in the quest vision that is synthesised into the literal quest, the poetic text - can be more than elegaic. English and German Romanticism had arrived at this point with its repeated fusion of romance and premonstration, admitting a historical modulation in consciousness and, most obviously in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, achieving what Harold Bloom describes as 'an internalisation of romance' where:

The poet takes the patterns of quest romance
and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so
that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the
movement of the poet himself from poem to poem. (17)

So the fundamental search can now be acknowledged to be within the self, exploring and widening consciousness by means of an examinatory technique which projects itself into what are often held to be hidden regions of the psyche. The cost of this internalising process is the

terrified awakening into self consciousness, the discovery of a self that is far from unified, as Hartman metaphorically puts it:

We dream, we wake on the cold hillside, and our
'sole self' pursues the dream once more. In the beginning
was the dream; and the task of disenchantment never
ends. (18)

But, with this in mind, the internalisation affords benefit which can be seen in a new clearer understanding of the interplay connecting all the parts of the psyche, a potential for knowledge of the unknown, a manner of poetry whose main concern is its own stance as a concrete manifestation of the abstract mental performance which gave it being. Poetry becomes its own subject once again, symbolically exposing that creative energy which caused it to be. In this quest the mediating (and meditating) ego becomes ultimately concerned with its own structure and the relationships between the various parts of the self which instigate poetic maturity. It is in this particular tradition that I would place *The Prince's Progress*.

Yet there is one huge qualifying factor here. Christina Rossetti is on the side of the princess. Rossetti sees that in the demonic Romantic quest the goal is relegated to inaction. If that goal be symbolic of the female aspect - as in all (male) love poetry - then woman becomes an empty symbol, devalued and silent. In quest literature like the *Sleeping Beauty*, woman is reduced to silence, literally and symbolically, as all emphasis is placed upon the prince's masculinity as embodied in the quest patterns. What then is her own quest? In terms of the traditional

form, to be met, to achieve conjunction (which happens or does not happen regardless of her own efforts) so that her representation is wholly in the service of the quester's progress. And what if the quester be inefficient, a bungler, and fail? Then woman's quest for representation necessarily fails too. She becomes an absence, silent and ineffectual. This is the injustice that *The Prince's Progress* seeks to expose. *The Prince's Progress* concludes, significantly, not in a marriage, but in a song, the experience of fruition of the creative poetic impulse. The poem as a whole evinces an interest in songs, their birth and status. Each stage in the Prince's episodic maturation is instigated by a song, the very existence of which as much as its summonary content, seems to spur the quester on, re-establishing the quest and its purpose. Emanating from the mysterious, disembodied 'sad glad voices' these summoning songs become noticeably more lyrical as the work progresses towards its close, the 'bride-song' of the 'veiled figures', also unidentified. One song ends and another begins, as 'the blossom of blossoms blow'. In the work, the initial and final states described (literally and symbolically) are decidedly disharmonious and non-unified. A manner of conjunction is achieved - the Prince does finally reach his destination - but the unsatisfactory, partial nature of this compendancy is posited as a necessary prerequisite to poetic creation. Allowed a classical 'closed' ending where the Prince and princess were joined in blissful wedlock, the text could not fulfill its primordial purpose, the location and dramatisation of the moment of inspiration which brings forth 'song'. To this end, the text presents an examination of the conscious/unconscious relationship rendered by means of the symbolic evaluation of the conscious ego, its education and development, voiced in

the series of trials undergone by the 'strong Prince' during the course of the narrative. In short, and as intimated earlier, the construction here of a narrative to preface the original song actively manifests a desire to explore the psychology and dynamics of poetic creation itself. It seeks to illustrate, as all Christina Rossetti's writing does, the difference between static tradition and the truth of active experience. We will now turn to analysis of that narrative in detail, aiming to show its furtherance, and consilodation, of those motives at work in *Goblin Market* and the earliest 'secular' lyrics, where disturbance of the conventional reading process facilitates redress of the anti-female bias in conventional literary address is conscientiously, dramatically enacted.

II

Till all sweet gums and juices flow.
Till the blossom of blossoms blow.
The long hours go and come and go,
The bride she sleepeth, waketh, sleepeth,
Waiting for one whose coming is slow: -
Hark! the bride weepeth.

The Prince's Progress begins on a cascade of assonantal and repetitive forms. The emphasis, notably, is upon long feminine vowel sounds and

rhymes. The opening conditional clause 'Till all sweet gums and juices flow,' - Keatsian and sensual, indeed sexual in import - denotes the immediate presence of a strong desire towards fruition. Full stops curtail the first two lines before the conditional is expanded upon: language itself is suspended in wait for the prospect of natural growth. Straight away the poem establishes a reversal of the traditional summons to the poetic muse; the female figure, traditionally the muse herself, must attend passively the arrival of 'one whose coming is slow', the questing hero who will allow her the gift of articulation.

Temporal certitude is also rapidly dislocated (as it was in *Goblin Market*), not by means of the traditional 'Once upon a time...' device which signifies this time and all time, thus outside of any time, but here by the hypnotic blurring of chronometry in 'The long hours go and come and go' which, along with the repetitive 'sleepeth waketh, sleepeth' establishes the idea of flux (and also of *extended* time) in the text. This is a notion later thematically developed in a questioning of the containability of seemingly disparate 'opposites'. Attention is repeatedly drawn to the areas of uncertainty which border any seemingly precise definition as the poem as a whole examines the way in which the various parts of the self are autonomous yet complementary, with boundaries unclear and limitations of influence and effect hard, if not impossible to establish. Indeed, the opening two stanzas of the piece must be taken together; whilst the second sestet is radical in being composed solely of dialogue, and thus self-contained as a register, it is yet the complement and partner to the first stanza, answering and developing ideas set out in the first six lines alone. The structure of the poetry

already mirrors and becomes an emblem of the projected symbolic content of the text.

The second stanza runs:

"How long shall I wait, come heat come rime?"
"Till the strong Prince comes, who must come in time"
(Her women say), "There's a mountain to climb,
A river to ford. Sleep, dream and sleep:
Sleep" (they say): "We've muffled the chime,
Better dream than weep."

The charmingly simple 'rime'/rhyme pun here is important. It turns frost into formal poetic structure and, by association, makes 'heat' symbol of the fire of inspiration, the glow of creative energy. The fusion of these two can bring about the poetic fruition sought, which the yearning for natural plenitude which opened the poem symbolically foreshadowed, and this, we learn, will occur when the 'strong' conscious ego, the Prince, 'comes' to achieve some conjunction with the maiden, the 'veiled bride' to the conscious, symbol of the unconscious. The soft, reassuring tones of 'Her women' (a concentrated expression of elemental femininity) at once define the objectives of the quest:

"There's a mountain to climb,
A river to ford."

The opening of *The Prince's Progress* deftly enacts a dislocation of the traditional quest directives. A distinction is quickly drawn, expressed from the female viewpoint, between the traditionally active role in the quest taken by the male hero and the absolutely passive part played by

the female heroine. In a manner we will find self-consciously formulated and openly discussed in *Monna Innominata* Christina Rossetti takes a traditional poetic scenario and proceeds to expose its conventions and rules as heavily weighted in favour of one (phallogentric) reading. In *The Prince's Progress*, the poem's progress, according to the principles of quest literature which have become normalised by years of quest literature, is (literally) controlled by the movements of the male subject whilst the female object must wait passively for the Prince to arrive. The codes and rhythms of the quest (like those of the poetry Christina Rossetti as an author inherits) have been wrought and defined on masculine terms; to take part in the quest (and to take part in poetry) woman must submit herself to male ordered patterns she seems powerless to undo. Thus the women, so early in the poem, advise the princess;

"Sleep, dream and sleep:
Sleep...
Better dream than weep."

Their advice recommends the passive act of dreaming over and above the active order of weeping, for, lodged within the quest narrative as its object, the princess can do no more than wait. In the final stanza of Tennyson's 'Mariana' (1830) weeping is offered as potentially articulate activity

She wept, "I am aweary, aweary,
O God, that I were dead!" (19)

But the weeping may only articulate the hopelessness of woman's plight here. No initiative is taken - to initiate within the male-determined atmosphere can be to become Eve (the seductress), and subject oneself to the history of religious and social disapproval (this issue is taken up in the 'Esther' sonnet of *Monna Innominata* (*Works*, p. 61), to be discussed in the following chapter). Importantly, the imperative to dream given here in *The Prince's Progress* immediately prefaces the introduction of the figure of the Prince. Potentially, this places the drama of this particular quest as a dream narrative generated from the princess's perspective - the failure of the quester might be seen as her commentary upon the quest and its rituals. In so much as it takes place upon a symbolic plane and will not result in any awakening of the sleeper, then this is a plausible reading. We know, also, from readings of other Rossetti works, her insistence that, within the fiction of her manner of poetry, whose purpose becomes not least the blurring of boundaries and defeat of expectation, a 'dream' may become as worthy a version of 'reality' as that portion of the fiction which describes the 'dream'. In fact, freed from the conditions of logic governing direct reportage, dream fiction may produce a more intense, questioning vision than 'realist' discourse ever could. In *The Prince's Progress*, deflections of certainty such as this succeed in emphasising the lack of one definitive authorial voice: as the poem narrates itself, many voices may be heard in the crowd of woven narratives.

We are introduced to the 'strong Prince... Taking his ease' in his dream-like 'world-end palace' with the tools of the quest 'his staff and his hat' lying idly by as he waits for the full moon. Only three stanzas

into the work, it is clear that the sense of urgency which will propel the narrative forward is coming not from the quester himself, but instead from the image of the object of the quest. In opposition to the negative voices of 'pale kings, and princes' of Keats' 'La Belle Dame' who encourage inertia, not quest, mysterious voices continually admonish Rossetti's Prince and urge him forward to the 'Spell-bound' - i.e. bound by the conventions of the quest - maiden. But to little avail.

Spell-bound she watches in one white room
And is patient for thy sake.

This is a telling image. The 'veiled bride' is trapped within an atmosphere of sterility 'for thy sake' - unable to function outwith the influence of the active male quester and, indeed, the male ordered quest poem. For now, the creative aspect within the feminine is contained - 'Spell-bound' - and held encapsulated until some interaction is achieved - the Prince's arrival in terms of the traditional folk tale - to release the 'spell' and achieve (poetic) conception. That there is desire for fruition within the female object of the quest is quietly confirmed by the image of the princess 'in her maiden bloom' - the 'bloom' referring directly back to the poem's opening couplet and its voicing of the desire for growth and fruition. But the 'true voice' of the Prince's 'doom' (and thus, by projection, an authoritative criticism of the hero's performance in quest myth as presented in this poem) offers a strong cautionary measure, extending the floral imagery.

'By her head lilies and rosebuds grow;
The lilies droop, will the rosebuds blow?
The silver slim lilies hang the head low;

Their stream is scanty, their sunshine rare:
Let the sun blaze out, and let the stream flow,
They will blossom and wax fair.'

Where lilies might stand for death and virginity at once, and roses represent sexuality and blood, it is clear that an ambiguous potential - positive or negative - resides within the language at this point. The prince must decide the outcome. The final couplet here constitutes a symbolic invocation to the muse, by implication the Prince himself, for it is his arrival which is encouraged simultaneously.

The Prince is 'Strong of limb if of purpose weak', and stanza 9 seems little short of sarcastic in its lamely idyllic presentation of the purposeless hero revelling in the certitude that everything will be well.

Forth he set in the breezy morn,
Across green fields of nodding corn,
As goodly a Prince as ever was born,
Carolling with the carolling lark; -
Sure his bride will be won and worn
Ere fall of the dark.

The ineffectual Lancelot of Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott' is echoed here in the presentation of mood, travelling through similar 'barley-sheaves' unaware of his destiny and his Lady's emotional condition - "'Tirra lirra," by the river/Sang Sir Lancelot' (20). Complacency reigns. 'So light his step, so merry his smile', begins the next stanza of Rossetti's poem. The narrative voice never allows us to forget the lack of urgency in the Prince's journeying, and emphasises his 'merry' mood, in direct contrast to the predicament of the waiting bride. 'Sure his bride will be won and worn' - there is a dangerous complacency about the Prince and

his notion of woman as a passive object to be 'worn' (as a trophy, yet also 'worn' out) by the conquering hero. This is a quester supremely willing to enjoy the ritual of the quest with no regard for the meaning of its goals nor any desire to assimilate any new knowledge which his progression towards the goal may afford him. The 'hundred sad... glad voices' have already warned the Prince that 'Time is short... use to-day while you may' (37-42) and yet, unheedful of their words at the first sign of a distraction;

The Prince, who had journeyed at least a mile,
Grew athirst at the sight.

'(A)t least a mile...' - again the tone is one of sarcasm, highlighting the hero's comical lack of purpose. In his intercourse (a sexual sort is implied) with the stereotypical 'wave-haired milkmaid' of pastoral discourse, we have our first real glimpses of the Prince's total inability correctly to read signs or adequately to move towards his goal: the muse which woman has come to rely upon to allow her a voice, mute as she has become within this poetic tradition, is quickly shown to be an unreliable, and thus unacceptable concept. No longer content to witness herself vicariously defined by male writing which places her as passive receptacle and silent object of desires, Christina Rossetti exposes the unfairness to woman of the heroic quest narrative in the sustained image of the helpless, tragic heroine, powerless to alter her own fate, and the blinkered, bungling Prince (firmly in the tradition of Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott' Lancelot again) who has the power but neither the urgency nor the vision to save her.

The device of the milkmaid, the Prince's first distraction, is one Christina Rossetti had employed six months earlier in a short but interesting poem titled 'A Farm Walk' (*Works*, pp. 367-8). In this work, the speaker might (dangerously) be assumed to be a London gentleman who has come North from the city to escape his busy life. The 'comely milking maid' he meets briefly stays in his mind afterwards as a symbol of pastoral innocence. Yet even here the poem calls into question man's appropriation of symbols as shells for his own use, to be filled with a meaning that will suit his purpose alone. The maid is reduced to a silent image, mirroring the male speaker's own desire (notably, her only words are exact echoes of the male speaker's own). This is a male voyeuristic fantasy and, as such, the woman becomes the passive participant, an extra in the phallogentric drama.

I stood a minute out of sight,
Stood silent for a minute,
To eye the pail, and creamy white
The frothy milk within it;

To eye the comely milking maid,
Herself so fresh and creamy.
Good day to you, at last I said;
She turned her head to see me:
Good day,' she said with lifted head:
Her eyes looked soft and dreamy.

The milkmaid here is 'comely' and 'dreamy' because she represents a fantasy towards which the male protagonist is attracted. Significantly, at the end of 'A Farm Walk', when the speaker resigns himself to the fact that he will not be seeing the maid again, he can not admit that she was important to him as a symbol he sought to appropriate into his

own fantasy world; rather, he prefers the (equally male-oriented vision) that she has been appropriated by another man.

Perhaps in farmhouse of her own
Some husband keeps her cosy...
Good-bye, my wayside posy.

In *The Prince's Progress*, the milkmaid episode is important because it presents the first distraction in the narrative, the first trial which the hero undergoes, and, thus, the initial testing of the mettle of our quester. As we have shown in previous chapters, much of Christina Rossetti's poetry may be taken as dealing with questions of reading and interpretation, or, more precisely, questions of misinterpretation and misreading. The presentation of the milkmaid makes it clear that, like the milkmaid in 'A Farm Walk', she is a figure to be interpreted; like any symbol (or any poem) she embodies the potential for plurality of meaning. She is ambiguously described as 'rosy and white';

Was she a maid, or an evil dream?

The milkmaid, who talks in riddles, is herself a riddle to be solved. She is a simple 'wave haired milkmaid', and yet, with her 'shining serpent coils', she is also a Medusa figure realised in diabolic terms, embodying more than one aspect of the feminine. The Prince's failure to decipher her correctly sets a pattern the rest of the journey will confirm. As a symbol, she has been assimilated into the patterning of the quest, but still she may dupe the Prince here due to her own active (unlike that suffered by the 'veiled bride') unwillingness wholly to submit to male

desires. The milkmaid demands reciprocal equality - 'Give me my fee,' she said.' - and indeed obtains it, yet ultimately she remains caught up and left behind in the quest world, illustrating further the predicament of woman conceived of as secondary to a masculine ordered version of experience. The use of language in this episode is very interesting, and the scenario it creates verges upon the surreal. The 'apple-tree', the 'heaven lowered black' with 'fire-cloven edge' and the 'cunning... shining serpent coils' in the maid's hair are the most obvious, ominous signs missed by the Prince as, like Laura in *Goblin Market*, he succumbs to temptation without hesitation. These images beg that the incident be read as a coyly realised Biblical fall myth, a simple allegory, but further clues to a fuller reading of the passage may be located in the strange language employed at this point, especially in the dialogue sequences.

'Whitest cow that ever was calved
Surely gave you this milk.'

This comment of the Prince's is an instance of non-logic - a cow's colouring does not influence the colour of its milk - and deftly conveys his misappropriation of the coding of symbolism which the poem itself investigates elsewhere. Playing on the Prince's naivety, the milkmaid seeks further to expose his lack of understanding.

'Give me my fee,' she said. -

'I will give you a jewel of gold.' -
'Not so; gold is heavy and cold.' -
'I will give you a velvet fold
Of foreign work your beauty to deck.' -
'Better I like my kerchief rolled

Light and white around my neck.' -

When the maid says 'Give me my fee,' she may as well be demanding 'Understand me as a quest symbol, tell me my worth, interpret me!' The word game which follows recalls the (admittedly less sinister) conundrums of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* adventures and shows the unwitting quester at the mercy of the woman's wit. The Prince quickly admits defeat.

'Nay,' cried he, 'but fix your own fee.' -
She laughed, 'You may give the full moon to me;
Or else sit under this apple tree
Here for one idle day by my side;
After that I'll let you go free,
And the world is wide.'

In language recalling Keats' 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1819), the maid, herself a secondary device in the male quest hierarchy, manages to subvert the tradition somewhat from within by gaining this little victory over the Prince. He is forced into letting the female describe her own worth, her 'own fee'. Her reply is at first enigmatic and then plain. Requesting the full moon - harbinger to the quest where the Prince was concerned - she thus demands that the premise for the quest be handed back to herself. Latterly, she asks for the Prince's attendance upon herself 'for one idle day by my side'. Unlike the masculine, possessive ethic where partners are concerned (the myth perpetrated by the quest tradition) the milkmaid recommends a less aggressive, libertarian approach.

'After that I'll let you go free,

And the world is wide.'

The Prince chooses this latter option. He will not 'give the full moon' to the maid, because to do so would be, symbolically, to relinquish man's hold upon the quest and all its implications. The Prince's reasons are typically selfish.

For courtesy's sake he could not lack
To redeem his own royal pledge;
Ahead too, the windy heaven lowered black...

No thoughts are spared for the princess; the conventions of the quest ('courtesy', a 'royal pledge'), and not its object, are uppermost in the quester's mind here. At least the milkmaid, with her 'subtle toils' has the power to deconstruct and subvert the codes of quest from within, whilst still playing an active part in the poem. In sad comparison, the passive princess has become a redundant symbol within the narrative taken from the traditional male perspective, so that fulfillment of the rites of the quest itself, regardless of their loaded implications, becomes the priority of the Prince, over and above any concern for the bride who is waiting.

So he stretched his length in the apple-tree shade,
Lay and laughed and talked to the maid,
Who twisted her hair in a cunning braid
And writhed it shining in serpent-coils,
And held him a day and night fast laid
In her subtle toils.

The Prince has succumbed to temptation and (emphasised by the biblical fall-myth imagery) is fallen, relinquishing any last hope of control over his own progress.

Awoken, again by the lark, symbol of the poet in song, who, like the 'sad glad voices' (first encountered in stanza 7, but now less 'meek') urges him to proceed and admonishes him as to his 'sluggard' nature, the Prince eventually resumes his journey. Immediately, the pastoral landscape is left behind and the atmosphere becomes one of pervasive sterility;

The grass grew rare...
A blight lurked in the darkening air...
Behind his back the soil lay bare,
But barer in front.

This barren, apocalyptic landscape, a 'lifeless... loveless land', (in part borrowed verbatim from an earlier sonnet, 'Cobwebs' (*Works*, pp. 317-8), is a land of inertia and frozen attitudes and one which presents our hero 'of purpose weak' with a stark image of the implications of his own lack of vital resolution.

A land of neither life nor death,
Where no man buildeth or fashioneth,
Where none draws living or dying breath;
No man cometh or goeth there,
No man doeth, seeketh, saith,
In the stagnant air.

Some old volcanic upset must
Have rent the crust and blackened the crust;
Wrenched and ribbed it beneath its dust
Above earth's molten centre at seethe,
Heaved and heaped it by huge upthrust

Of fire beneath.

To use a phrase adopted by Christina Rossetti herself when discussing her own lack of poetic inspiration, '[t]he fire has died out' (21). The 'fire beneath' this earthy crust was once so potent that it '(w)renched and ribbed' the surface and came forth. Now, all is sterile and lifeless. Like the questing Prince, and like the codes of the quest itself, all the life force has been removed and only the barren picture remains. The Prince has truly awoken into 'solitude'; the awakening is a painful one, but one which could be his salvation if he only read the signs correctly and learn from them. The visible signs of nature - the changing, symbolic landscape of *The Prince's Progress* - and the trials he undertakes continually, repeatedly present intimations of the spiritual world, with all its noble potential. Equally, they emblematised the imbalance in the nature of the male ordered quest, the approaching apocalypse of hope and the tragic predicament of the princess - all signs which are ignored or misread by the Prince and only acknowledged by the female voices (or those of nature) which persistently urge him forward.

The perilous journey through a wasteland is a chief aspect of the major adventure in quest romance. In myth, the entire purpose of this expedition was to bring about the revitalisation of nature; here, however, as in many post-Romantic quest poems - from Browning's 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' (22) to Eliot's *The Waste Land* (23) - this 'land/Of rugged blackness' is not only imaged as a phenomenon of external nature, but as a state of mind as well, making implicit the

notion that the quester's search is one for spiritual renewal. There are echoes again (and not only in this section of *The Prince's Progress*) of Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' in Rossetti's poem. Where Keats has '...on thy cheeks a fading rose/Fast withereth', Rossetti insists '...up rose the Prince with a flush on his cheek', and Keats' description of his hero '...Alone and palely loitering' finds a more accusatory echo in Rossetti's 'You loitered on the road too long.' Though there are obvious correlations in the two works - both being quest myths - the differences in treatment of the mode is marked. Keats' disillusioned hero, who like Rossetti's prince moves against the bare, blighted landscape of solitude, is at least granted the visionary power to interpret and explain his sad predicament; Keats' whole poem begins with a question which it becomes the business of the 'knight at arms' satisfactorily to answer. Though Keats' hero appears to have little chance of recovering his anima, his 'lady in the meads', his 'latest dream' at least presents him with an explanation of his loss;

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cried - "La belle dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!" (24)

This image of all the other 'pale kings' who have sought and lost the same vision of beauty lets the knight of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' know his own projected fate. The 'horrid warning' might have come too late, but it does establish a degree of certitude which the poem in structure strives towards;

And this is why I sojourn here,

Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Keats' hero is a sad but not directly culpable figure in his own fate - in direct contrast, Christina Rossetti's prince is continually allowed the prospect of redemption and the recovery of innocence, though he does not accept the offer. Keats' knight concisely explains the barren wasteland he occupies in terms of the forced negation of his quest: Christina Rossetti's quester is allowed the vision of bleakness and sterility whilst there is still opportunity to correct the progress of his journeying. Of course, he again misreads the signs around him, still believing himself on the right road;

Rueful he peered to right and left,
Muttering in his altered mood:
'The fate is hard that weaves my weft,
Though my lot be good.'

Dim the changes of day to night,
Of night scarce dark to day not bright.
Still his road wound towards the right,
Still he went and still he went...

Throughout the poem, Christina Rossetti's prince is a dumb participant in the death(s) which surround him on his journey, making implicit symbolically what is made explicit in terms of the plot at the poem's close - his guilt in bringing about the death of the princess, the ultimate object of his mission. The prince moves idly through a series of what Rossetti as a woman sees to be redundant quest conventions, always blind to the fate he is actively bringing about, which must be painfully, passively submitted to by the helpless princess. Unlike Keats'

hero, Rossetti's quester is given warnings in advance of the dreadful circumstances which await; the warnings become progressively stronger and more explicit as the poem proceeds, and, significantly, the prince heeds none of them.

Compounding his plight, then, Rossetti's knight fails to make any positive deductions from the barren landscape he finds himself transversing. In fact, he directly disobeys the admonishments afforded to him after his last dalliance with the milkmaid.

'Up, up, up' called the watchman lark,
In his clear reveillee: 'Hearken, oh hark!
Press to the high goal, fly to the mark.
Up, O sluggard...

In turn urged by the 'sad glad voices' to go 'Up, up , up,' and ascend, the prince, by now predictably, chooses to descend below the ground. Unlike Keats' Endymion, and in turn Homer's Odysseus, the prince's underworld descent, through a cave down to labyrinthine depths, is one of escape. The other questers are prompted by the possibility of discovery in the nether world, to find or achieve something spiritual in import. The prince of Rossetti's poem is seeking refuge in the cave 'world of trouble'; by now, he is drifting aimlessly on the tides of the quest, merely going through the motions and rhythms thrown up by the journey, having relinquished any real conception of his goal. The initial description of the cavern the prince enters is notable in that it strongly delineates the place as 'a grave', and, moreover, a version of hell. In other epics, the cave jointly symbolises a grave of death or a

womb of life, but it is clear which reading is to dominate the prince's experience of the underworld.

Out it flashed from a yawn-mouthed cave,
Like a red-hot eye from a grave.
No man stood there of whom to crave
Rest...

Retreating into this hellish catacomb, the prince faces the prospect not of rebirth but of further compounding his predicament; he escapes from the vision of solitude into a vision of the confused searching which his own quest now represents. He meets a mirror version of himself.

In he passed and tarried not,
Groping his way from spot to spot,
Towards where the cavern flare grewed hot:-
An old, old mortal, cramped and double,
Was peering into a seething-pot,
In a world of trouble.

As the prince is a quester, so the Alchemist is also a quester. The central positioning of the episode of the Alchemist in *The Prince's Progress* reflects the centrality of its symbolic import in the overall 'system' of the poem. Interestingly, D. M. Stuart insists that *The Prince's Progress* was 'originally christened The Alchemist' - an appealing claim to which no source is given nor does any appear to exist: the notion is, however, indication of the influence of the Alchemist section over the rest of the poem's events (25). Fred Getting, in a recent book on this area of study notes the following concerning Alchemy and its actual practice in Mediaeval times.

The gold he sought was not really a metal at all. Rather than taking the path to worldly riches, the alchemist was seeking an inner secret, looking for a way to develop his own inner world of vision and understanding...
...The genuine alchemists were concerned with spiritual things. They did not look into dross metals... Indeed they looked into the dross of man, that ordinary, untransformed inner life of man which they visualised as a sort of dead weight, containing more riches of miraculous powers than anyone could ever imagine...
The serious alchemist sought to discover a secret whereby the wonderful powers he could feel in his own soul, or which he could sense within his own inner being, might be released into the world in their full glory. (26)

In this sense, there are strong, obvious similarities between the Alchemist and the Poet, both of whom have a quest to relate their inner world to the 'dross' of everyday existence. From her father's substantial work in the area of the Occult, its codes and symbolism, Christina Rossetti cannot but have been aware of the signification of the practice of Alchemy - her learned father wrote at length on this very subject (see Chapter 5 of this thesis, n. 48). Furthermore, its links with the strivings of the poet and its mythical potential as a symbolic quest would not have escaped someone whose life's work revolved around an investigation of patterns of symbolism and their ideological implications. Of this function of Alchemy, another recent commentator has noted;

True symbolism is not fantasy, though both are the products of the imagination. Symbols attempt to express such fundamental principles that are synchronistically true for the outer world of matter and the inner world of the psyche, both of which stem from the same source and consequently behave according to the same principles. Over the years Alchemy provided ample proofs to substantiate this duality,

since its practitioners continually applied archetypal symbols to a microscopic universe, and time and time again the symbol demonstrated its validity in both spheres, the psyche and matter. (27)

Alchemy, then, becomes a major archetypal symbol itself, an emblem of the quest and any quest. With its insistence upon the importance of a symbolic appreciation of elements in any pattern, it is clear why Christina Rossetti so vehemently included the Alchemist episode as the central point of her reworked quest epic. In her subtles scheme of things, the Alchemist is indeed symbolic of the poet's (and perhaps in particular the female poet's) struggle to make elemental sense from out of a world where everything is no longer pure and unequivocal ideology comes masquerading as truth. Of course, like the milkmaid, the Alchemist must ultimately function within the terms of the quest and obey the rules of the quest tradition Rossetti seeks to subvert by highlighting their inadequacies in the course of the poem. Hence, on a wider reading, the Alchemist becomes a symbol of the poet, the seeker for truth; but, caught in the predetermined world of the quest, he cannot make order from the chaos and becomes in particular a microcosmic mirror version of the prince himself. This important potential for ambiguity of interpretation is commented upon at the old man's death.

Thus the dead man stayed in his grave
Self-chosen, the dead man in his cave;
There he stayed whether fool or knave,
Or honest seeker who had not found...

Like the prince, the 'old, old mortal' finds the object of his quest too late, and the result is death. This episode represents an emphatic

statement on Rossetti's part of how the search for truth within the present frame of reference afforded by poetry in general is an impossibility - whether the quester be 'fool... or honest seeker', with no gender specified. The old man dies, his death providing the ultimate ingredient in his impossible quest for the Elixir Of Life. Alchemy deals with the separation of the various ingredients of Life and the consequent recognition of the relationship between these elements. It is a notion concerned with transformation and is on this level an investigation of dualities, the awareness of alternatives. As such, on one important level, it is Christina Rossetti's way of illustrating, simultaneously, the impossibility of truth within the male-ordered scheme of poetry, and the need to redress the balance if truth is to be reclaimed.

Ironically, the reiteration of the traditional patterning of the quest instanced by the Alchemist's death, serves to give fresh sustenance to the male quest. The prince emerges hugging his 'phial of Life' and seems to have new energy as a result. However, his complacent attitude to the quest, and forgetfulness of its original goal, remain as he manages (ll. 263-82) to sleep through another 'summons' to action and finally resume his travels 'drowsy' and 'though late'. This presumptuousness is plainly conveyed through the knight's own words as he leaves the old man dead.

Come what will of wind or weather
This draught of Life when my Bride is won
We'll drink together...

This hero knows no conditional sense when it comes to his questing; it is the affirmative, smug 'when my Bride is won' again, and never 'if'. Nonchalantly riding a quest tradition that, by its terms and premises, seeks to guarantee him successful passage, the prince never admits the possibility of failure. That is left to the (female) voices which urge him on through the poem.

He can sleep who holdeth her cheap,
Sleep and wake and sleep again.
Let him sow, one day he shall reap,
Let him sow the grain.

The prince sets off once more 'though late' clutching his 'phial of Life'. This Elixir of Life, like the rest of the work, must be read as primarily symbolic since, as an actual device in the subsequent narrative, it is redundant and never empirically tested. Again the prince appropriates its meaning to his own ends, taking it as a sign that his quest is proceeding naturally to its certain conclusion, and, encouraged by the leaving of solitude behind, once more his enthusiasm grows in inverse proportion to the ominous warnings he receives. All urgency is now gone; the prince has forgotten his purpose. The text emphasises his sluggishness now, as he embarks on a leisurely nature ramble.

By willow courses he took his path...
Loitered a while for a deep-stream bath,
Yawned for a fellow-man...

... It's oh for a second maiden, at least,
To bear the flagon, and taste it too,
And flavour the feast.

His baptismal, partial drowning is, like the rest of his trials along the quest, the result of his own choosing and by now characteristic lack of foresight. (Like the old alchemist, his fate is 'Self-chosen'.) Also, reflecting the tender of the Alchemist episode, his being saved by the mysterious host (it is tempting, especially with the language of the section, to read them as a kind of holy trinity, but there are four of them, again disturbing complacent assimilation of the parts of the text) gives the potential for another symbolic rebirth to be misread by the quester. That the ministering figures and their diction are framed in Biblical, angelic tones further allows for confusion. However, as if by way of deflecting emphasis away from the life or death scene taking place by the waters, abrupt interruptions remind that another struggle has been going on for a long time elsewhere. The resussitation of the hero is punctuated by further parenthetical commentary from 'Her women', only now they are resigned to the fate in store for the princess; they no longer admonish, now they merely observe passively the lack of progress. Like the princess, they have also been rendered ineffectual and redundant by the traditional conventions of quest literature.

(O Bride! but the Bridegroom lingereth
For all thy sweet youth.)...

(If many laugh, one well may rue:
Sleep on, thou Bride.)

By this point in the narrative, all is lost. The imagery itself becomes wholly unfathomable as it is unclear whether or not the prince - laid beneath a willow - is indeed dead or alive, and whether his saviour is a Christ figure, or an idealised anima, or both.

Oh, a moon face in a shadowy place,
And a light touch and a winsome grace,
And a thrilling tender voice that says:
'Safe from waters that seek the sea -
Cold waters by rugged ways -
Safe with me.'

The evidence here is deliberately inconclusive; as the princess has been left to fade away, the quest is losing meaning. Even the prince himself - proven by his trials to be a wholly unreliable interpreter anyway - has given up searching for meaning, no longer bothering to 'weigh' or 'scan'.

Had he stayed to weigh and scan,
He had been more or less than a man:
He did what a young man can,
Spoke of toil and an arduous way...

This is a revealing quatrain; in deceptively simple terms, it states quite bluntly how, to the male forgers of the tradition (and those who since uphold it) there has come a point where its values and rhythms have been assimilated into the mode as absolute truths. A 'man', traditionally, does not 'weigh and scan' the ideology inscribed within the quest myth, its bias against female expression and its assumption of male superiority, but accepts these without question, perpetuating the falsehoods by speaking 'of toil and an arduous way' - reaffirming the quest myth - regardless of the passive plight of the female object, who remains wholly defined by the male's progress.

The promise promised so long ago,
The long promise, has not been kept.

As the prince has relinquished his promise of fidelity of attention to the princess, so the whole quest tradition has become unfaithful to woman's needs, rendering the female sex as helpless, speechless participants in a game invented by and played by men. The conventions of the order have become such that, within the rules of the convention, ('She in her meekness, he in his pride...') woman can only express herself through subversion or by, literally, becoming an absence in death, unattended by the male hero. The prince's final burst of positive energy is highly ironic; he is 'stung' into action finally by the poem's certitude that hope is lost. Yet still, lulled into his old ways by the elysian valley he crosses to the royal palace, his complacency - playing out the 'strong' hero role to the last - returns.

Light labour more, and his foot would stand
On the threshold, all labour done;
Easy pleasure laid at his hand,
And the dear Bride won.

As *The Prince's Progress* reaches a conclusion with the beautiful, original 'Too Late For Love' lyric, the princess is finally, indirectly and partially given a voice. It is a disembodied, fragmented voice, the voice of an absence. Within the terms of the set patterns of quest romance, the woman's quest (for representation) fails. Had the prince 'arrived' in time, the poem's ending would have been traditionally one of closure where the silent princess is whisked away - no doubt to live 'happily' with so many children - by the hero. In Christina Rossetti's remoulding of the quest, the princess at least achieves partial representation - her death at least brings forth a 'song'. But the

representation is still one governed by the male influence; only because the prince has been tricked by the subverted quest symbols Rossetti sets as snares and has, thus, arrived too late may the princess alter the fate which centuries of unsubverted tradition has itself decreed for her.

By shrewd manipulation of the codes and ideologies quest myths have relied upon for their impact since the earliest times, Christina Rossetti goes somewhere towards reclaiming another poetic tradition from the male monopoly. She shows woman as trapped, imprisoned in a permanent, silent hiatus, a coma, within a form (the quest poem) which proceeds from the premise of the male as active seeker of a truth he is sure of finding. The form (like the bungling Prince) is shown to be inadequate to woman's needs and desires so that, if she is to appear as other than silent in the tradition, her expression must forcibly be one of lack and desire unfulfilled, regardless of her own endeavours. Such is the energy behind the 'death-wish' yearning which so many male commentators locate in the poetry of Christina Rossetti. The poem's final coup is Rossetti's bold imaging of that which the text has argued into direct terms applicable to the repressed female in Victorian society. She is finally describing her own predicament, and that of any woman, all princesses trapped in the agony of forced inaction and non-expression. This is an angry poem now.

We never heard her speak in haste:
Her tones were sweet,
And modulated just so much
As it was meet:
Her heart sat silent through the noise
And concourse of the street.

There was no hurry in her hands,
No hurry in her feet;
There was no bliss drew nigh to her,
That she might run to greet.

As Eliot, in the *Waste Land*, uses a mythical landscape (indeed the 'Mythic Method') to render the fragmented, disordered surface of modern sensibility, so, in *The Prince's Progress*, Christina Rossetti reworks the recognisable patterns of Quest Romance so that they form a metaphor not for a move towards stable identity and regeneration, but rather as an illustration of the inarticulation afforded to the feminine aspect (the feminine subject, potentially) by the tradition of male ordering and male interpretation of myth and legend. Eliot himself describes Joyce's employment of the 'mythical method' in *Ulysses* thus;

(The Mythical Method) is simply a way
of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a
significance to the immense panorama of futility and
anarchy which is contemporary history. (28)

In *The Prince's Progress* and many other poems, Christina Rossetti is giving shape and significance to woman's predicament as silent 'other' in the male-ordered view of the world as amplified repeatedly by poetic tradition in general and quest poetry in particular. This despairing quest for expression is intensified and furthered in Rossetti's finest poem, and most sustained articulation of the strain felt at being marginal to an inherited tradition manufactured by others, *Monna Innominata*. In this complex sequence, we find the intertextual, literary-historical aspect of Rossetti's writing amplified to violently confrontational proportions, and the concern with religious faith, which

was singularly to occupy Rossetti's late writings addressed in open and provocative terms.

NOTES

- 1) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70 p. 68
- 2) *Ibid* p. 69
- 3) *Ibid* p. 72
- 4) *Ibid* p. 72
- 5) *Ibid* p. 74 'The annotated Prince' appears to be a portion of *The Prince's Progress* on which my brother had written some remarks'. This is W. M. Rossetti's note.
- 6) *Ibid* p. 78
- 7) Packer, L. M., ed., *The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1963) Letters VI, 10-12
- 8) Rossetti, W. M., ed., *Rossetti Papers* p. 78
- 9) Packer, L. M., ed., *The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters*, VI, 10-12
- 10) *Rossetti Papers* p. 74
- 11) *Ibid* p. 88
- 12) Hill Jnr., R. W., ed., *Tennyson's Poetry: Norton Critical Edition* New York; Norton, 1971) p. 408
- 13) *Rossetti Papers* p. 81
- 14) Dombrowski, T., 'Dualism in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti' in *Victorian Poetry* 14 (1976) pp. 70-6, quotation p. 70
- 15) Bettelheim, B., *The Uses of Enchantment* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1978) p. 5
- 16) *Ibid* p. 5

- 17) Bloom, H., *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (London; University of Chicago Press, 1971) p. 15
- 18) Hartman, G. H., 'Romanticism and Anti-Self Consciousness' in Bloom, H., ed., *Romanticism and Consciousness* (New York; Norton, 1970) pp. 46-56, quotation p. 54
- 19) Hill Jnr., R. W. ed., *Tennyson's Poetry* p. 8
- 20) *Ibid* p. 16
- 21) *Rossetti-Macmillan Letters* p. 99
- 22) This poem is said to have been one of the 'prime favourites' of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the 'magnificent series' *Men And Women*, and must have been well known to Christina. Source Doughty and Wald, ed., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* I, p. 278
- 23) Eliot, T. S., *The Waste Land* (London; Faber, 1922)
- 24) Keats, John, *Poems* ed. Allott, M., pp. 500-6
- 25) Stuart, D. M., *Christina Rossetti* (London; Macmillan, 1930) p. 74
- 26) Gettings, F. *Visions Of The Occult* (London; Hutchinson, 1987) pp. 140-1
- 27) Chetwynd, T. *A Dictionary Of Symbols* (London; Paladin, 1982) p.9
- 28) Eliot, T. S., 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* ed. Kermode, F., (London; Faber, 1975) pp. 175-8, quotation p. 177

5. *MONNA INNOMINATA*

Had such a lady spoken for herself...
Christina Rossetti, Preface to *Monna Innominata*

Here is a great discovery, "Women are not Men"...
Christina Rossetti, letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Und doch, bist du nicht der,
an den wir uns ganz ohne Reste verloren?
Und werden wir in irgendeinem mehr?
Rilke, 'Gesang der Frauen an der Dichter'

[And yet, are you not the man
In whom we might totally and utterly absorb ourselves?
And do we in any measure thus become more?
Rilke, 'The Women Sing To The Poet']

I

Poetry in general, and in particular the Western sonnet tradition, right from Dante and Petrarch through Sidney and Ronsard to more recent writers, has dictated that the love poem proceed from the subjectivity of a male speaker. Characteristically, the male poet addresses the goodness and beauty of an (usually) unavailable female object who becomes at once his Muse and the means by which his own identity is defined in song. The female is the muse, the male the maker. The speaker and addressee are not normally named, thereby ensuring that the poetry take on an eternal dimension - the female object representing a visionary essence over and above any specific personage from history. The verbal wooing which constitutes the traditional courtly love poem is underwritten by a repeated patterning which seeks to define identity through confession of desire which simultaneously maintains the gender placings of lover as male and loved one as female. All these set conventions of love-poetry define the male as subject and the female as 'other' and, thus, make the mode a hugely problematical area for the woman writer. For the female poet, to inhabit the male-ordered tradition of sonneteering is to upset long established notions of subjectivity, to be forced to interfere with a set equation which has traditionally (with a few exceptions) held woman prisoner as the silent, passive object of male desires since its formulation.

But, as we have seen in previous chapters, it is precisely this notion of the misrepresentation at work in the poetic forms which, as a woman

poet writing in the nineteenth century, she inherited, that gives energy and bite to the poetry of Christina Rossetti. *Monna Innominata* (*Works*, pp. 58-64) continues the female poet's interest in redressing the iniquity towards woman inscribed in poetic tradition by working another subversion of a received mode - this time the courtly love sonnet sequence. With its bold prefatory remarks outlining the strategy of the piece in no uncertain terms, *Monna Innominata* forms the most overt statement of Rossetti's dissatisfaction with the position allocated to woman by the gender division perpetuated by the literary canon. Like *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress*, *Monna Innominata* allows a comfortably assimilable reading at a literal level. The work gives a platform for the hitherto unsung feelings and thoughts of the Muse to whom the tradition of courtly love poetry has been addressed.

Had such a lady spoken for herself, the
portrait left us might have appeared more tender,
if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted
friend. (Works, p. 58)

The implication is obvious: woman has persistently been misrepresented and must now speak 'for herself'. Answering the distortions perpetrated by the poems specifically of Dante and Petrarch and, notably, the female Victorian writer Elizabeth Barret Browning, the speaker of the fourteen sonnets paints a bleak picture of woman's lot. The scant, sedentary plot opens with the speaker's reaction to the man's absence, continues with her musings upon the relationship between secular and holy love, and ends with the man's total disappearance, leaving 'Youth gone, and beauty gone' for the poetess as heroine, and 'Silence of love that cannot sing

again' (XIV, 1, 14) for the heroine as poetess (1). Founded upon contemplation rather than action, the literal level of *Monna Innominata* does cohere perfectly well but, again as with so much of Rossetti's work, one detects an equally coherent subtext at work in the poetry. The note preceeding the sonnets unmistakeably alerts the reader to the thesis of the sequence: the unfulfilled longing described in the bare narrative of *Monna Innominata* functions in the service of a equally strong desire to invert stereotypical conventions of poetic address, thereby exposing the injustice to woman in the traditional literary canon.

The circumstances of the composition of *Monna Innominata* are not at all well documented. With characteristic lack of precision, William Michael Rossetti gives the date of completion of the sonnet cycle as 'before 1882' - which seems distinctly probable seeing that the sequence of fourteen poems was first published in 1881 in *A Pageant and other Poems*. Her brother acknowledges his uncertainty about the date of the poems;

The MSS. of Christina Rossetti's poems, up to 11 June 1866, are, with few exceptions, extant and dated in notebooks; but after that time, although several MSS. exist, few precise dates are traceable. Christina published the *Prince's Progress* volume in 1866 - the *Pageant* volume in 1881. The reader will understand that, in saying 'before 1882' - in this instance, and the like in several others - I do not imply that the composition was written *shortly* before 1882, for it *may* date at any time between June 1866 and 1881. I am seldom, in such cases, able to approximate the true date nearer than this.

(*Works*, p. 462)

A letter sent to William Michael indicates that Christina Rossetti sent the poems to be included in the *Pageant* collection to her publisher Alexander Macmillan in April of 1881.

At last I took the plunge and sent in
some poems to Macmillan, who before he saw accepted
them, - for I wrote first on the subject and he
closed with them forthwith. (2)

It may be assumed that *Monna Innominata* was among the poems forwarded. Three months later - one day after the proposed publication date of the *Pageant* volume, postponed owing to binding problems - the sonnet cycle is directly referred to (and given a name for the first recorded time) in another of Christina's communications, this time to Dante Gabriel Rossetti;

William [Michael Rossetti] saw the sonnets
before you, merely because calling one day he
downright asked to look at book, (*sic*) - a nervous
moment for me, though I braved it out. Those he
means are *Monna Innominata*... (3)

We may only conclude, then, that the sonnet sequence was completed before 28 April 1881; it is impossible to be more precise. Yet instances of biographical vagueness such as this may be taken as pleasantly appropriate once the strategy of Christina Rossetti's poetic work is fully considered. Historical determination as to the correspondence between poet-life and poet-writings has plagued criticism of Christina Rossetti's work. *Monna Innominata* translates as 'Unnamed Lady' and, in her own note prefacing the cycle, the author speaks of 'donna

innominate', the unnamed women who formed the conventional object matter of Italian courtly love lyrics of the thirteenth century. She refers, significantly, to two poets of this period who actively broke with tradition by consistently naming the addressees of their lyrics - Dante, who wrote to his Beatrice, and Petrarch whose Laura of the *Rime* is also pronounced a real person by the poet. Beyond the narrative of the Rossetti sequence, these indicators suggest that there are other energies - with the notion of 'naming' and its implications where historical actuality or psychological structures are concerned - at work in the text. The 'Unnamed Lady' is interested in matters of signification.

As we have seen, *Monna Innominata* works an inversion of the typical Renaissance lyric, allowing the woman to speak, as the 'Unnamed Lady' becomes the specified point of origin of the song, the poetic subject. The addressee is said to be male, but tellingly is also left unnamed. This lack of specific external reference is characteristic of Rossetti's work. Speaker and spoken to are hardly ever named as figures from actuality; in the great majority of her lyrics the 'you' addressed is undetermined as to gender or number. Even when a proper name is supplied, as in the poem 'No, Thank You John', one must be wary of jumping to historical conclusions. Of the latter piece, which Dante Gabriel Rossetti regarded as overly personal (4), William Michael Rossetti knowingly infers;

I think I understand who John was;
he dated, so far as my sister was affected, at
a period some years prior to 1860... (5)

William Michael Rossetti thought that the John of the poem was the painter John Brett, who displayed affection for Christina in 1852 (eight years before the verses were written, making the poem's protestations rather belated). This speculation, along with any others as to the identity of John, is somewhat crushed by Christina Rossetti's own written insistence that

... no such person existed or exists. (6)

This consistent, marked avoidance of direct external reference in the poetry has worked to the detriment of the author where criticism of the works is concerned. As we have seen, Christina Rossetti was herself a shy, reticent and withdrawn person. Her adult life, as noted previously, was a sad one of much illness, and she found it necessary, upon religious grounds, to decline two offers of marriage which, had it not been for the differences in devotional outlook, she would almost certainly otherwise have accepted. The first offer came in 1848 from the painter and Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood member James Collinson, the son of a Mansfield bookseller, who reverted from Catholicism to the Anglican Church in an attempt to sway the High Anglican Rossetti; the second proposal occurred in 1866, coming from Charles Bagot Cayley, the linguist and translator of Dante. Both episodes were understandably painful experiences which deeply affected Christina Rossetti. Predictably, as a result of this unusual life history, much past criticism of Christina Rossetti's poetry has concentrated itself largely upon establishing historical correlatives for the poems, noting the date and place of composition and thence speculating as to whom the

addressee or event referred to could possibly be. Such biographical detective work has its place but seems a highly reductive method of *literary* criticism. Certainly, it strives to attach one consummate meaning to each single text, thus, presumably, making the critic who 'discovers' that meaning the ultimate critic of the text in question. This process of historical detection is not only an uninspired way of reading poetry, but also a highly vulnerable one. Lona Mosk Packer based the whole four hundred and fifty pages of her 1963 study *Christina Rossetti* upon the 'tentative hypothesis' (Packer's own words) that, from the age of seventeen onwards, Christina was passionately, secretly in love with the Scots painter William Bell Scott, a married man. Packer speculates upon the substance of meetings which it is claimed took place between the two, recording dates and circumstantial testimonial evidence, and concludes with wearying insistence;

It is unlikely that a poet as subjective as Christina would conceive this [impassioned love] poetry in an emotional vacuum; consequently, we can only surmise that it was addressed to someone who does not appear on the record.

The evidence I have uncovered points to the name of William Bell Scott... (7)

Packer's work appears more scrupulous than it in fact turns out to be. Unfortunately for her, less than a year after the publication of her study, the Bell Scott theory was deftly blown asunder by a paper in *Victorian Studies* by Professor William E. Fredeman, totally discrediting Packer's hypothesis, showing that her data was at best largely supposition and at worst fabrication, and noting furthermore Packer's lack of attention to vital documentation, discovered at Penkill Castle,

of Scott's movements. The caustic condemnation of Packer's work is telling.

Circumstantial evidence derived primarily from the poetry makes impossible the precise documentation of a theory for which there is not a scrap of positive and direct proof. (8)

Apart from ruining the friendship between the two critics, Fredeman's paper had the effect of rendering Packer's book (ironically, one of the few substantial works to take Christina Rossetti seriously as a poet) no more than an exercise in conjecture or imaginative biography bordering on romance fiction. The episode illustrates the precarious position of the critic of literature who follows solely the path of biographical determinism. An all-consuming eagerness to place poems in strict biographical context seems to me unlikely to be productive of valuable literary criticism since, above all, it denies the primacy of imagination. All praise to the critic who deduces that the addressee of T.S. Eliot's 'A Dedication To My Wife' is Valerie Eliot. This revelation is of little relevance once we involve ourselves with a study of the poetry itself, its use of language, its debt or relationship to tradition, its symbolic structuring and tone.

Only recently, in the last ten years, has criticism of Christina Rossetti's work ventured beyond these historical considerations. With the advent of structuralist and feminist critiques, interest in the poetry has at last caught up with interest in its author's life. It is no longer necessary to regard Rossetti's verses as confessional letters directly

addressed to Collinson, Cayley, Bell Scott or whoever. There is no reason why the unnamed figures which appear with substantial regularity in the poems - the strong lover, the golden haired maiden, the spectre, the sisters, the absent loved one - should have historical counterparts and their occurrence in the lyrics may or may not have been the consequence of actual events in the lifetime of the author. The case cannot usually be proven either way: Christina Rossetti, when alive, was keen, in correspondence, to deny the existence of external referents for the personae which inhabit her writing. In the devotional prose work, *The Face of the Deep* (1892), this topic is addressed openly and succinctly;

Far from being necessarily an insurmountable disadvantage, I think that ignorance of the historical drift of prophecy may on occasion turn to a humble but genuine profit. Such ignorance entails (or wisely utilised might entail) that a general lesson, a fundamental principle, essence not accident, will be elicited from the abstruse text. Further:- instead of attention being directed to the ends of the earth, our eye must be turned within... (9)

This is the case with Rossetti's poetic productions. The prominent and recurrent stock figures of address demand to be read as emblematic expressions of urges within the self crystallised into seemingly identifiable forms, concrete expressions of otherwise abstract notions. Thus the unnamed male addressed in *Monna Innominata* need not be Bell Scott, Cayley or Collinson, but an intertextually wrought product of her reading and her creative energies, an imagined male essence, *animus* or soul-mate to the feminine aspect which Christina Rossetti's poetry seeks to reclaim and redefine by its inversion of the love lyric mode. In the

first sonnet of the sequence, it is made apparent that the addressee is conceived of as a vision, or 'essence not accident';

For one man is my world of all the men
This wide world owns; O love, my world is you. (I, 7-8)

Elsewhere, the loved one is described as truly a part of the speaker;

O my heart's heart, and you who are to me
More than myself myself... (V, 1-2)

From these bold examples, it is clear that the poem encourages a reading having a psychological frame of reference. The contemplative sonnets are hugely self reflexive in tone and this, coupled with a prefatory note deeply conscious of the literary tradition in which *Monna Innominata* lies, should alert us to the main strategy of the cycle. The poetic text functions as a map of the self executed in emblematic fashion, an essentially symbolic construction ordered in a supra-narrative manner. As vagueness of external reference and literary reflexivity are indicators toward this way of writing, then so is the open-ended nature of the typical Rossetti poem. *Monna Innominata* is the epitome of all these areas. The text precludes certitude and complacency in favour of interrogation and ambiguity as, by stretching modes of discourse until the ideology inscribed within them is revealed, traditional conventions and patterns are rewritten to make a new story, woman's story.

II

Monna Innominata is a poem painfully conscious of its own stance as poetry. Subtitled 'A Sonnet Of Sonnets' - fourteen poems to match a sonnet's fourteen lines, the volta coming with the eighth sonnet as it arrives in the eighth line of every poem in the series - it showcases a favourite poetic form of Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the sonnet. To appreciate the full implications of the *Monna Innominata* series, then, it is essential to consider the tradition of writing, the love lyric and sonnet tradition as exemplified in the work of Dante and Petrarch, invoked by Christina Rossetti in the prefatory remarks to her work. The love lyric, and notably the sonnet (with its rigid structure and established pattern of argument and denouement) allows a platform for inquisitive contemplation. Housed within the set framework of the lyric we find philosophical musings already in the Southern European troubador poetry of the thirteenth century (examined in detail later in this chapter); this is another broad tradition of the love lyric, realised through a combination of subsidiary images and terms, which transfers itself to the sonnet cycle tradition itself, which then becomes a base for intellectual explorations. This process instigates a self-referential tendency in the tradition which never leaves the discipline. Paul Oppenheimer writes provocatively, in his study *The Birth Of The Modern Mind*, of the self-introspection which becomes an integral part of the sonnet tradition.

Modern thought and literature begin with the invention of the sonnet... As such it is the first lyric of self consciousness, or of the self in conflict... The sonnet seeks to catch and echo the melodies "unheard" of the human soul, to use Keats' phrase, melodies both passionate and silent, both intimate and celestial. (10)

If early *European* poetry is referred to here, Oppenheimer's point is a debateable one, but his remarks do emphasise the intellectual appeal of the sonnet. The pleasure which Christina Rossetti drew from her exercises in the form - and the compulsiveness of her nature in this area - is indicated by the family's favoured choice of parlour game. *Bout-rimé* sonneteering was one of the Rossetti family's favourite pastimes, as Professor Crump has noted;

When Christina was seventeen she played a literary game with her brother William. The game was known as *bouts-rimés* because each player received a series of rhymed line endings which he had to use in writing a poem. In order to afford a greater challenge, the Rossettis often chose the sonnet form; moreover, a player was expected to complete his composition as quickly as possible. Christina was quite successful at this game. She was usually able to produce a creditable sonnet in less than ten minutes. (11)

Anyone who has looked at the sonnets Christina Rossetti produced in this way (a number are published in the *Collected Poems*) will recognise the understatement of the term 'credible' which Crump prefers; Christina was a remarkably talented, as well as a prolific sonneteer.

Both Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti produced sonnet cycles. Indeed, the term 'sonnet sequence', which has now become customary for

contemporary sonnet collections, was first coined by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in a letter to his writer friend Hall Caine who was in the process of preparing a sonnet anthology (which included works by Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti);

I have thought of a title for your book. What think you of this?

A Sonnet Sequence

from Elder to Modern Work, with Fifty
Hitherto Unprinted Sonnets by Living
Writers.

That would not be amiss. Tell me if you think of using the title A Sonnet Sequence, as otherwise I might use it in the House Of Life... (12)

Hall Caine did not honour Rossetti's suggestion and called his anthology *Sonnets Of Three Centuries*; Dante Gabriel went on to call his *House Of Life* a 'Sonnet Sequence' and the term was established.

In his excellent study of the Victorian sonnet, *Scanty Plot Of Ground*, William T. Going notes;

It was the Victorian poets... who broadened the tradition of the sonnet sequence and added new complexity and significance to an old genre. (13)

This is certainly the case with Christina Rossetti, and nowhere are there better examples of the 'new complexity and significance' than in the *Monna Innominata* series. In writing the sequence from a woman's perspective, Christina Rossetti not only 'broadened the tradition' in which she was working, but inverted, and thereby subverted the mode. To show just how the subversion acts, it is necessary to outline the

particular poetic implications of the form that Rossetti isolates in her subtle commentary. An examination must be made of the poetics of the love lyric, of Dantean and Petrarchan adaptations in particular; only then can *Monna Innominata* be approached with confidence and read in a manner akin to that which its author intended and indeed in her own notes to the poem, begged.

Beatrice, immortalised by 'altissimo poeta ... cotanto amante'; Laura, celebrated by a great though an inferior bard, - have alike paid the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but (at least to my apprehension) scant of attractiveness.

These heroines of world-wide fame were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies, 'donne innominate,' sung by a school of less conspicuous poets; and in that land and that period which gave simultaneous birth to Catholics, to Albigenses, and to Troubadors, one can imagine many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude, while the barrier between them might be one held sacred by both, yet not such as to render mutual love incompatible with mutual honour.

Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend...

(*Works*, p. 58)

These provocative remarks show their author as acutely aware of the ideological implications of the poetical form she is, by redrawing 'the portrait left us' by this male-constructed ideology, about to readdress. *Monna Innominata* is a prime example of a text exploring its own specified aims and overtly commenting upon the tradition of poetry which it extends, rewrites and criticises. Again, within the parameters of a poetic form synonymous with introspection, we may witness the work of Christina Rossetti reflecting upon its own status; openly recording its position in a literary canon made by men, the woman's poem becomes

a shrine to mark its own conception. Poetry has become its own subject. But (as ever with Christina Rossetti) this is not a dilettante, self-serving device. Consciously structured with regard to the poetic form it modifies, *Monna Innominata* remanages and manipulates tradition in such a way as to foreshadow a manner of consciousness often said to be characteristic of Modernist Art. With this in mind, any literary-historical aspect addressed here will primarily engage the manner of literary-interrelationship summoned by the text of *Monna Innominata*. Simply put, *Monna Innominata* looks forward and backward at once. In doing so, the sequence sets up a tension between a version of the poetic self and its (hi)story and a given pattern of language which, for the woman writer, must raise issues concerning any and all narrative representation. This undertaking revolves upon a major regard to the issue of signification (in one sense, naming) obtaining between subjects and predicates, selves and narratives which shows itself in the singularly non-narrative element always at work whenever a poem of Christina Rossetti's attempts to narrate a 'story' or posit chains of sequential (i.e. historical) cause and effect. Echoing Romantic reasoning (as epitomised in Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey'), Rossetti repeatedly shows that the very attempt, the *trying* to come to a conclusion is more important than the conclusion that is - or is not - reached. *Monna Innominata* tells us little of incidents but deliberately (re)constructs the character of the 'donna innominata' of the sonnet by allowing her the 'attractiveness' of a voice. In this, Christina Rossetti recalls a comment made by Wordsworth.

It seems to me that in poems descriptive of
human nature, however short they may be, character

is absolutely necessary ... incidents are among
the lowest allurements of poetry. (14)

As a close reading of the text will confirm, *Monna Innominata* is Rossetti's masterpiece because it repeatedly locates an insistence upon the priority of *poetic* relationships in their production of significance and, hence, in their presentation of poetic tradition or literary history. Poetry upholds its value-laden ideology by blinkered repetition; Christina Rossetti upsets the rhythm. Motivated by her sex, driven by a desire to investigate the signifying possibilities of (modes of) discourse, inverting patterns of symbolism, interrupting the notion of literary-historical coherence, Christina Rossetti produces *Monna Innominata*.

The embodiment of mental notions, noted earlier as a prime tenet of the love sonnet tradition, inevitably involves a simultaneous consideration - a calling into question of the notion of signification, the process of naming (and *un*-naming), the implications of and the reasoning behind such operations. Explicitly singled out for attention in Christina Rossetti's note prefacing *Monna Innominata*, Dante and Petrarch themselves broke with tradition by giving a specific name to the lady described in their lyrics, quite deliberately turning what had hitherto been an unattainable ideal figure into an historical personage. Prior to Dante and Petrarch, the unnamed, elusive lady of the love lyric had stood as a stock symbolic device, representative of the anima, soul mate or feminine aspect to the male psyche, a personification of the feeling function with regard to the self, a crystallisation of the emotional side

of human nature and, thus, an apt area for the lyric to address. Thus, Guido Cavalcanti, a contemporary of Dante, openly speaks of his lady as an inner, psychological function;

My soul weeps through her sighs for grievous fear
And all those sighs, which in the heart were found,
Deep drenched with tears do sobbing thence depart,
Then seems that on my mind there rains a clear
Image of a lady, thoughtful, bound
Hither to keep death-watch upon that heart. (15)

The object of address here is clearly more a visionary essence, the result of an emotionally accrued state, than a person from actuality. In this manner, historical correlatives for the ladies who populated the lyric were neither necessary nor were they traditionally given, until the poems of Dante and Petrarch. Of course, the announcement of a proper name for the addressee of a literary work does not inhibit us from reading the works as turning upon psychological states, analyses of the state of love itself rather than of the loved one. Even though it has been shown that the figure of Beatrice may be rooted in identifiable temporal 'reality', she still stands as one of the most potent anima expositions in the history of world literature. Holmes statement that Beatrice

... is an invention, but an
archetypal one ... (16)

seems to me not only empirically unstable, but also imaginatively unsound. The two are simultaneous, if offered, and certainly not incompatible. Beatrice is Beatrice; haply, she is also a

metaphor for the divine, a neo-Platonic essence. And Laura is the same. But the transfiguration of the 'real' person metaphorically to emphasise the spiritualisation of romance, the naming of the ideal, in poetry is an innovation and does represent a pivotal point in a literary tradition, the implications of which Christina Rossetti explores in *Monna Innominata*. In doing this, Rossetti is locating her interest at a point far back in the history of the sonnet. But this does not mean that she is overlooking the treatment of the form in the five centuries separating her own writing from that of the Italian courtly poets, merely that *Monna Innominata* expresses the desire to retrace tradition back to a particular junction, one which, in Christina Rossetti's opinion, allows the clearest perception of the inception of a patriarchal ideology which, though gently challenged by a few male sonneteers over the years, had yet to be engaged from a female perspective. In her preface to *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti's correlation of Dantean/Petrarchan poetics with those of E. Barrett Browning's *Sonnets From The Portuguese* shows her provocatively aligning the formulation of the phallogentric gender-equation within the sonnet with its unchallenged expression by a Victorian woman poet. This considered, intertextual approach to the implications of poetic tradition, undertaken from an avowedly *female* position allows us to regard *Monna Innominata* as a truly radical work.

The polemical structure and argument of *Monna Innominata* - its deconstruction of literary tradition from a feminine perspective - make the poem revolutionary in the history of the sonnet. The critique of the male-ordered conventions of the love-lyric, which Rossetti's cycle openly offers, is itself not wholly innovative nor original. At this level,

Christina Rossetti might be taken as the extensor of a subversive strain which had long sought to ironise the 'true' perspective upon the world which the sonnet, with male speaker as subject and woman as silent, passive object, had originally set out to promote and legitimise. Though, certainly prior to the Victorian age, they remain marginal to the central male-determined patterning of the sonnet form, there are examples through history of sonnets aiming to subvert the patterns passed down as stock conventions and positions from the time of Dante right up to the nineteenth century.

Reading Italian courtly love poetry, we find that many of the attitudes, images and modes of address present in the lyrics of Dante and Petrarch - which also inhabit the sonnets of Ronsard, Sidney and Shakespeare - are already well established as standard conceits by the time these two poets come to employ them. Of course, there is an important, vast difference between a 'standard' conceit and a 'stale' conceit - the success of otherwise of an image turns on matters of context (an issue informing Rossetti's own frequent employment of recontextualisation of discourse in pieces such as *Monna Innominata*). If conducted in a manner that is not born of idle assimilation of ideas, the echoing of earlier images (within the same work, or intertextually through history) can expand meaning, as in Milton's 'Lycidas' or Gray's 'Elegy', for instance, where the summoning of traditional forms serves to reinforce the elegaic need for continuity in a mortal world by conveying a sense of continuing tradition both reassuring and admonitory. This is also the case with modern as well as ancient author's - one need only think of T. S. Eliot's remanagement of conventional images in *The Waste Land*. If we are able to

recognise a 'cliché' as active and functioning anew, then it transcends the dead realm of 'cliché' and begs re-interpretation: it is this potential for the revitalisation of language which makes Christina Rossetti's interest in Dantean and Petrarchan forms one worth considering carefully. Towards the end of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (a work translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and referred to later in more detail) a sonnet appears whose theme is set out in its opening couplet;

For certain he hath seen all perfectness
Who among other ladies hath seen mine.. (17)

The same motif occurs in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*;

Who seeks to see the best Nature and Heaven
can do among us, come and gaze on her...
... all loveliness, all regal-mannered ways
joined in one body, tempered marvellously (18)

Such an exalted praise, visualising the lady addressed in terms of divine perfection, is (unlike the naming of the girl) not a device original to these two sonnets, but, rather, a stock, repeatable stance adopted by the lyric speaker. It may be found in the work of the Sicilian court poet Cielo D'Alcamo, written before the birth of Dante or Petrarch, in his 'Dialogue: Lover And Lady', here translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti;

For I never did love a maid
Of this world, as thou art,
So much as I love thee...

Yea, even to Babylon I went
And distant Barbary:

But not a woman found I anywhere
Equal to thee, who art indeed most fair. (19)

The same attitude prevails in the Messinan judge, Giudo delle Colonne's 'To Love And His Lady', written before 1250 and, again, translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti;

O comely-favored, whose soft eyes prevail,
More fair than is another on this ground... (20)

Similes, as well as metaphorical address, are also repeatable. Delle Colonne's poem concludes with an extended simile in which the frustrated lover sets himself within a nautical image.

Love rocks my life with tempests on the deep,
Even as a ship round which the winds are blown... (21)

This scenario is reproduced by Petrarch in the *Canzoniere*.

My ship full of forgetful cargo sails
through rough seas at the midnight of a winter...
... and I despair of ever reaching port. (22)

One finds many such rhetorical constructions becoming assimilated into the lyric poetry of the Italian Renaissance as stock, repeatable devices. The personification of Love as a divine essence 'who conquers all' (23) bringing a sense of potential order to the emotional turmoil articulated by the lyric speaker, the imaging of Death as a spectre, the comparison of the lady to the red rose and the capturing of her essential qualities

in idyllic pastoral imagery to provoke a reading of her as the universal essence of Beauty, ultimately unattainable but a metaphor for the neo-Platonic ideal, the Divine Goddess of Beauty. All these forms, and many more, can be located side by side in the thirteenth century text, gradually being assimilated into the poetic stream to become stereotypical modes of articulation, in turn adopted by poets taking up the lyric cause in later times until each writing of a lyric becomes a re-writing of tradition, a mixture of set patterns and sometimes innovation of the poet's own making. Indeed, the majority of these expressions are established literary vehicles long before the writings of Dante - they are present in Ovid and Catullus, certainly - and, as such, their appearance affirms the fact that, at one level anyway, Dante and Petrarch were content to write within a conventional tradition, that descended from the troubadours of twelfth century feudal France.

Passed on through history, these standard modes of address are largely accepted by male bards as conventions by means of which the lyric poem constructs identities. Sometimes, however, the integrity of these conventions is questioned and the passiveness of response of the female addressee is vigourously qualified in certain male poets. We need look no further than Spenser, Drayton, Donne and Shakespeare for examples of the mockery of traditional idealisation and the questioning of absolutes, leading to a (re)humanisation of the sonnet and lyric mode, often through something close to jesting. At one level, the symbolic 'unknown' - the neo-Platonic function - continued in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century sequences; the naming of Sidney's 'Stella' (the pole-star) and particularly Drayton's 'Idea' would seem to indicate an

attachment on the part of these poets to the traditional idealistic modes of lyric address. The naming of Spenser's *Amoretti* (little love pieces) certainly allows for traditional idealisation of a Stella type, as exemplified, in true Dantean fashion (see p. 205), in the twenty fourth sonnet of the cycle;

When I behold that beauties wonderment,
And rare perfection of each goodly part:
of natures skill the onely complement,
I honour and admire the makers art. (24)

But, simultaneously, the intimate 'little love pieces' encourage a much more personal, even jesting perspective to emerge within the sonnets, by means of which the poet ironises his conventional stance as 'lover tormented' by introducing another recurrent theme, the notion of the 'theatrum mundi':

Of this worlds Theatre in which we stay,
My loue lyke the Spectator ydly sits
Beholding me that all the pageants play,
Disguyfing diuersly my troubled wits.
Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,
And mask in myrth lyke to a Comedy:
Soone after when my joy to sorrow flits,
I waile and make my woes a Tragedy.
Yet she beholding me with constant eye,
Delights not in my merth nor rues my smart:
But when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry
She laughes, and hardens euermore her hart... (25)

The initial recognition in this sonnet of woman's customary passivity - 'like the Spectator' - and its emphasis upon the male-subject's conventionally 'troubled wits' are fully in concord with the standard gender relationship as conditioned by mediaeval lyric. However, the

conventionality of the opening quatrain immediately gives way to the lover's knowingly ironic description of his woes, as, extending the theatrical image of the poem's opening lines by allusion to literary genres, the artificiality of the lover's 'mask' or conventional pose is emphasised and mocked. The sestet offers a further critique of the traditional lyric love-scenario by light-heartedly picturing the woman's active involvement in the drama; her mockery of the lover's predicament forms an ironic commentary upon the the whole artifice of the sonnet mode.

In the sonnets of Michael Drayton we encounter a fertile, inquisitive mind intent upon questioning and redirecting the absolute ideals of image and address which the sonnet mode offered to the poet as his raw materials. In the dedicatory sonnet to his *Idea* sequence, Drayton makes clear his reluctance idly to adopt an idealistic position.

Into these loves, who but for passion lookes,
At this first sight, here let him lay them by,
And seeke else-where, in turning other bookes,
Which better may his labour satisfie. (26)

There is an overt rejection of the traditional pose of the male speaker of love lyrics which, as the sonnet proceeds, is reinforced by a yearning for poetry 'desiring change', denying the 'farre-fetch'd' conventions of the mode and injecting a refreshing degree of humanity and realism into the traditionally idealised form, 'still desiring change'.

No farre-fetch'd sigh shall ever wound my brest,

Love from mine eye a teare shall never wring,
Nor in *ah-mees* my whyning Sonnets drest,
(A Libertine) fantastickly I sing:
My verse is the true image of my mind,
Ever in motion, still desiring change...

Drayton provides a direct, at times sarcastic treatment of the old lyric themes, disregarding convention in favour of a scepticism that is both invigorating and (unlike the traditional male poetic posture) self-deflating. 'They that are blind, are minstrels often made,' he pointedly opines from his position of commentator upon the customary poetic etiquette (27). For example, the speaker of the *Idea* sequence manages an attack upon the traditionally extolled figure of Cupid;

Cupid, I hate thee, which I'de have thee know,
A naked starveling ever may'st thou be,
Poore rogue, goe pawne thy fascia and thy bow,
For some few ragges, wherewith to cover thee... (28)

Drayton's unwillingness to re-employ the idealistic tone of the sonneteer gives his *Idea*, first published in 1594, a refreshing incisiveness. The determined avoidance of a stable, idyllic relationship between speaker-subject and ideal-addressee is sometimes cuttingly cynical. Though his ultimate goal is traditional in nature - 'All that I seeke, is to eternise you.' (29) - Drayton's mockery of the traditionally silent, passive role of woman in the love lyric is achieved with considerable charm.

Nothing but no and I, and I and no,
How falls it out so strangely you reply?
I tell yee (faire) ile not be answered so,
With this affirming no, denying I.
I say, I love, you sleightly answer I:
I say, you love, you peule me out a no:
I say, I die, you eccho me with I:

Save mee I crie, you sigh me out a no... (30)

The surfeit of punning here, whilst conveying the traditional pose of the tormented male poet-speaker, functions to introduce a measure of equality of input to the poem from subject and addressee; Drayton's loved one is far from wholly passive within the scheme of the *Idea* cycle. Drayton's sonnets manage to maintain the image of the lover in torment so essential to the mediaeval lyric, but now the torment stems from the active involvement of the female-addressee in the love-relationship, rather than from the idealistic presentation of the passive, unattainable female essence of yore.

Since ther's no helpe, come let us kisse and part,
Nay, I have done: you get no more of me,
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly, I my selfe can free,
Shake hands for ever, cancell all our vowe,
And when we meet at any time againe,
Be it not seen in either of our browes,
That we one jot of former love retheyne...(31)

The lovers' relationship is still predominantly presented from the male perspective (to be questioned in the poem's sestet), but the subjectivity of the speaker is here constructed through interaction with the object of his desire, allowing the woman a degree of activity outwith the restrictive codes set out by the thirteenth century love lyric. 'Vowes' made are 'our vowe', with both parties engaged in their formulation. When Drayton's speaker desires a 'selfe' that is 'free', his female counterpart is allowed to share in the liberation; she becomes something

of an equal - the 'kisse' and the 'Shake hands' represent a contract of equality - and no longer a secondary consideration.

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* provide many similar instances of dissatisfaction with the stylised discourse of the sonneteer and the implications which this has concerning the gender structure of the love relationship. Specifically, Shakespeare addresses the lofty deification of the loved one, a time honoured trademark, as we have seen, of the love lyric.

So it is not with me as with that Muse,
Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse,
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse,
Making a proud complement of proud compare,
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems. (32)

It is almost certain that the poet directly referred to here is Sir Philip Sidney who, in praise of his heroine, calls upon the 'proud compare' Shakespeare rejects, in his *Astrophil and Stella* cycle. But, whatever its particular target, this sonnet locates and attacks a general trend integral to the whole sonnet tradition, a trend seen as dispensing with relevant particulars of information in favour of repeatable, stock images. 'Llet me ... but truly write,' begs the speaker of Shakespeare's verses (33), and this search for a mode of articulation outwith that preferred by poets like Sidney (though Sidney too was capable of ironising his role as poet-speaker) leads him to write an mocking satire of the idealised portrait of the loved one which dominates the history of the love lyric.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. (34)

This series of parodic inversions, where the expected idealistic simile is switched to a uninhibitedly realistic overview conveyed in simple, monosyllabic language, forms a plainly spoken attack upon the unreal comparisons common to the Dantean and Petrarchan lyric. The purity of the love which Shakespeare's speaker wishes to articulate would be 'belied by false compare', were he to adopt the traditional, idealistic imagery of the troubador poet. Instead, this sonnet attempts to retrieve a degree of purity of vision by lampooning the empty diction of traditional amatory representation. Shakespeare's sonnets are repeatedly drawn to such analysis and exposure of the ideological implications of standardised poetic conceit - 'mine eyes/... in thee a thousand errors note,' we are informed us at another place in the cycle (35). Comparing his predicament as a writer to that of an 'unperfect actor on the stage' (36), Shakespeare's speaker shows himself supremely aware of the inherited formal structuring and codes of the medium within which his utterances will be judged. Finally, with many of the other antique conventions exposed, the passivity and silence traditionally demanded of the female addressee of the sonnet are openly questioned.

Those lips that Love's own hand did make
Breathed forth the sound that said 'I hate'
To me that languished for her sake.
But when she saw my woeful state,
Straight in her heart did mercy come,

Chiding that tongue that ever sweet
Was used in giving gentle doom:
And taught it thus anew to greet,
'I hate' she altered with an end,
That followed it as gentle day
Doth follow night who, like a fiend,
From heaven and hell is flown away.
'I hate' from hate away she threw,
And saved my life, saying 'not you'. (37)

Woman is, quite literally, here allowed a voice, and her vocal activity lets her, equally literally, become the ultimate controller of the sonnet's direction and conclusion. The male speaker is totally under the command of the usually submissive female addressee; it is she, now, who *actively* defines the poet-speaker's identity. By, metaphorically, saving the life of the speaker in the closing couplet, the woman is repaying the debt of life - of a voice, and thus an active self - allowed to her by this sonnet's inversion of the standard gender placings prescribed by the love lyric. Unlike Caliban, who uses his gift of language to curse the giver, Shakespeare's lady, resurrected to life by being allowed a voice 'Breathed forth', immediately uses this restored function to thank the provider. 'I hate ... not you', declares the lady, now the guiding subjectivity of the verse, because this particular 'you' is one who has temporarily stepped down from the position of male dominance traditional to the love poem, to allow the normally silenced female to speak awhile. That this egalitarian 'you' is repaid with love and not curses, it might be argued, confirms that the poem, though its conclusion is determined by the terms of female utterance, is ultimately ascribable to a male hand.

It can be seen, then, that the lyrics of Spenser, Drayton and Shakespeare go some way towards showing women, in reality, playing more than an idealised, passive role in a normal relationship as expressed in love poetry. However, being male, these writers lack the oppositional sensibility of Christina Rossetti in their approach to the phallogentric ideology masquerading as truth within the terms of the love poem, and they are certainly not as consistent as she in their re-evaluation of the hitherto male-monopolised poetic equation. Nevertheless, the ironic tradition which the sonnets of these male poets graft on top of the broader literary canon of love poetry is one which partially foreshadows the central subversive concern of *Monna Innominata*. It represents a concession on behalf of the male poet-speaker towards admitting the injustice to woman perpetrated by the traditional love lyric; no doubt Christina Rossetti would have respected such a concession but, as the preface to *Monna Innominata*, with its bold allignment of the mediaeval position with the Victorian ethos, makes clear, it is not sufficiently radical an ideological shift to placate the female consciousness and redress the balance of five centuries of inequality. The cynic might argue that the non-traditional sonnets of Spenser, Drayton and Shakespeare (and especially the lyrics of John Donne) merely illustrate the dominant male-subject's power occasionally to retreat from a position of superiority and allow the little woman a say in matters. In doing so, they do not offer a total, only a very slim, partial relinquishment (and certainly not an absolute rejection) of the patriarchal ideology inscribed in poetic tradition since the days of Dante. Donne and the Metaphysical poets were well versed in this partial critique of the male perspective, but the Cavalier poets and Rochester

returned in a more cynical, dogmatic way to the absolutist male perspective. An opportunity was lost, and the subversive tradition is little more than a footnote to the phallogocentric canon through history. Ultimately, this is why Christina Rossetti must trace tradition back five centuries to Dantean and pre-Dantean poetics in her search for an unpolluted ethos.

Dante himself gave the name 'Dolce Stil Nuovo' ('Sweet New Style' or 'Sweet New Manner') to the variety of courtly love address developed in Tuscany and favoured by the lyricists of the school with which he was associated (38). It is a form of writing whose discourse overlaps with that of the contemporary physiology, inherited from Ancient Greece, and philosophy based upon the theories of Aristotle, as expressed in *De Anima*. Intellectual power of reason was seen as removed from the emotional, feeling function and the human soul was divided into three parts. These were the vegetative, the sensitive and the rational, operating in the body through three faculties - the natural spirit in the liver, the vital spirit in the heart, and the animal spirit in the brain. In his study *Dante*, Holmes summarises the relevance of this physiology to the conventional presentation of the affected lover in the courtly lyric.

The mechanism of love was that the
impression made upon the eyes by a beautiful
lady sent spirits moving to the heart, the
seat of the emotions, from which other
spirits informed the reasoning and memory
faculties in the brain. (39)

This operation, metaphorically realised in the love lyric, finds the poet intellectualising over the structure of the human soul, examining notions of the self and its divided nature. The extended image which speaks of love entering through the eyes, usually as darts or arrows, thence attacking the heart and thereby informing the mind, marks the conventional manifestation of this contemplation. Many of the sonnets of Guido Cavalcanti (to whom Dante dedicated the *Vita Nuova*) revolve around this notion;

Love, who hath drawn me down through devious ways...
'Tis he who hath hurled the dart, wherefrom my pain,
First shot's resultant! and in flanked amaze
See how my affrighted soul recoileth from
That sinister side wherein the heart lies slain. (40)

An early work of Dante's illustrates just how firmly he remained within the above tradition. The lyric, 'Deh, Violetta, che in ombra d'Amore', is here translated literally;

Ah, Violetta, you who so suddenly appeared to my
eyes in Love's shadow, pity the heart that puts its
trust in you and is dying of desire...
You, Violetta, in a more than human form, you kindled a fire
in my mind through the heart, that I saw; and then by the
action of a fiery spirit you quickened a hope that
partly heals me when you smile at me... (41)

In the third poem of the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch recalls this recurrent image.

... I was caught, and I put up no fight,
my lady, for your lovely eyes had bound me...

Love found me all disarmed and found the way

was clear to reach my heart down through the eyes
which have become the halls and doors of tears.

It seems to me it did him little honour
to wound me with his arrow in my state
and to you, armed, not show his bow at all. (42)

Here are many conventions borrowed from the long tradition of courtly love poetry - the personification of Love, the disturbing power of the supra-human vision of beauty, the resulting turbulence of heart and mind, the 'spirits' transmitting effects through the body. Both Dante and Petrarch make free usage of these inherited forms.

It is not difficult, then, to demonstrate the similarities between the lyric writings of Dante and Petrarch and those of their contemporaries. There are, though, important ways in which the work of these two writers *differs* from the poetic tradition which they directly inherited. With her own avid interest in rewriting tradition and re-ordering conventional poetic systems, there can be no doubt that it *in* their *difference* from, rather than their similarities to the accepted poetic modes of their contemporaries which caused Christina Rossetti to single out Dante and Petrarch as points in a poetic canon she was herself about to re-address.

Firstly, we must deconstruct the 'Dolce Stil Nuovo' of Dante to discover what is really *new* (as opposed to idly reiterated poetic convention) about his writing. The most obvious revolutionary device pioneered by Dante (and that most obviously picked up on by Christina Rossetti when she came to write *Monna Innominata*) is his repeated insistence upon a

historical referent for the 'lady' he praises, denoting an original desire to anchor his ideal female form in an empirical, external 'reality'. Beatrice is not the only female addressee of the Dantean lyric to be named - others include Violetta, Matelda, Pietra and Lisetta - but she is the ultimate symbol of his spiritual life, occupying the same position with regard to the speaker of the poetry as does Laura, also verifiable as a figure from history, to Petrarch's work. Dante's Beatrice was born a Portinari and married a Bardi (both were more distinguished families than Dante's own) and she died, aged twenty four, in 1290. Apart from these recorded facts, she exists primarily as a poetic configuration in the *Vita Nuova*, possibly the most highly attuned visualisation of a poet's spiritual self in the history of the lyric. The work was well known and highly admired by the Rossettis; Dante Gabriel made a translation of the text which he sent to Tennyson in 1850 (43) and which was eventually published in his collection *The Early Italian Poets* in 1861 (44). He praised the *Vita Nuova* greatly as being

so full of intricate and fantastic analogies ...
much more than appears on any but the closest
scrutiny... (45)

I would suggest that Christina Rossetti - who referred to Dante as 'a fascinating centre of thought' (46) - gave the Dantean text 'the closest scrutiny', particularly in the period of conception of *Monna Innominata*, which coincided with the publication of her brother's translation. Indeed, the Rossetti family in general were steeped in knowledge of Alighieri's life and works. The father, Gabriele, (who also wrote on Petrarch) had, after all, been possibly the foremost Dante scholar of his

age, studying the Italian poet with an intensity which 'reached the far side of devotion' (47). In an obituary, published in the *Spectator* after his father's death in 1854, William Michael Rossetti paid tribute to Gabriele Rossetti's studies, calling him 'the most daringly original of the commentators on Dante';

[H]e engaged deeply in studies of the letter and spirit of Dante's imperishable works.. Rossetti's leading idea (indicated in his work, and enforced in subsequent productions with the fervour of a discoverer, vast literary diligence, and indefatigable minuteness of criticism) is that Dante, in common with numberless other great authors, wrote in a language of secret allegory, which embodies, in the form now of love, now of mythology, now of alchemy, now of freemasonry, the most daring doctrines in metaphysics and politics. (48)

In particular support of William Michael's eulogistic claims, Gabriele Rossetti's publication *La Beatrice di Dante* (1842) shows an overtly philosophical interest in the implications of Alighieri's heroine - his daughter, Maria Francesca's *Shadow of Dante* (1872) evinces an equally intense, though less intellectual fascination with the Italian poet (49). Margaret Sawtell states, in her critical-biographical study *Christina Rossetti*, that, specifically during the period 1866-1870, '[Christina Rossetti's] main mental preoccupation seems to have been the study of Dante';

Maria [Rossetti] was engaged on her book *A Shadow Of Dante*, published about 1870; D. G. produced in the course of time *Dante and his Circle* which Christina describes as 'a monument of loving labour'; William Michael [Rossetti] made a translation of *The Divine Comedy* which she calls 'the best we have' ... Cayley also was busy on Dante, and in 1867 an article by Christina herself, called 'Dante:

an English classic,' was published in the *Churchman's Shilling Magazine*. (50)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti calls the *Vita Nuova* an 'Autopsychology'; he is correct to do so since, like Christina Rossetti's poetry, the *Vita Nuova* consciously offers a sustained conception of the inner mental (as opposed to physical, outward) growth of its speaker (51). In 1293, by taking thirty one of his early poems and embedding them in a prose narrative which maps the history of his relationship with a lady named Beatrice, in such a fashion that the poems are offered as if intimately inspired by stages in that love story, Dante (willing to write within a defined tradition as we have seen) undertakes a bold literary experiment. Like Christina Rossetti with her critical prefacing of *Monna Innominata*, at both surface narrative and poetic levels Dante becomes the direct critic and interpreter of his own work, its conception and meaning. This concern with literariness and context, a concern echoed by Christina Rossetti in her own work, is clearly announced in the opening paragraph of the *Vita Nuova*.

In that part of the book of my memory before the
which is little that can be read, there is a rubric,
saying, *Incipit Vita Nova*. Under such rubric I
find written many things; and among them the words I
purpose to copy into this little book; if not all of
them, at least their substance. (52)

There is an immediate and pronounced interest here in processes of reading and writing - 'book', 'read', 'rubric', 'written'; the text straight away tackles the problem of 'words' and their 'substance', thus raising the issue of signification which intensifies into the central theme of

the work. When Beatrice appears in the narrative, we are provided with precise details of her dress, age and history - she is forcefully presented as a historical entity, an actual person. But coupled with this empirical presentation, a simultaneous idealism is established in the text. Dante speaks of Beatrice as seeming 'not to be the daughter of a mortal man, but of God' and stresses that 'her image ... was with me always' (53). The moment when the speaker of *Vita Nuova* first sees Beatrice at the age of nine is described as that time

when first the glorious Lady of my mind
was made manifest to my eyes. (54)

So, in the terms set out here, it is clear that the figure of 'the glorious Lady' stands primarily as a mental essence, an essence allowed signification by the poet-speaker through the medium of an actual person, Beatrice Portinari, on earth, consciously grounding an abstract ideal in an identifiable version of reality. Indeed, later in the narrative, the speaker admits of the object of his desire;

no sooner do I image to myself her marvellous
beauty than I am possessed with the desire to behold
her, the which is of so great a strength it kills
and destroys in my memory all those things which might
oppose it. (55)

This plainly expressed passage stresses beyond question the speaker's unquenchable need for a concrete, visual manifestation to image to him the elemental essence which is his soul mate or anima, traditional object of the lyric poem. For Dante, Beatrice Portinari becomes that

which signifies beyond doubt the spiritual yearning of the poet. The text fixes upon the actual person of Beatrice and transforms the empirical actuality into the heavenly metaphor.

Once it is established as a consistent metaphor, the *Vita Nuova* seeks to affirm the inevitability, the 'proper' nature of this innovative procedure, the naming of the ideal and seeking to verify the internal, unknowable by the external, knowable. The text is one which repeatedly looks for stability. *Certainty* (and its pursuit) becomes a governing theme of the work: the relevance and employment of Beatrice as a divine metaphor is lightly questioned upon occasion but the issue is always resolved in favour of the inevitable correctness of the configuration of heroine and ideal, a reflection of the divinely ordered scheme of things which the *Vita Nuova* (notably in its dealing with the notion of signification) continually strives to echo. The letter and spirit are reconciled and the bridge between them is one founded upon religious certitude. Early on in the work, the speaker openly ruminates upon this desire to close the gap between the 'word' and the 'thing';

The name of Love is so sweet in the hearing that
it would not seem possible for its effects to be other
than sweet; seeing that the name must needs be like unto the
thing named: as it is written: "*Nomina sunt*
consequa rerum." (56)

"Names are the consequents of things" - this thought is one which gives the speaker 'no rest'. A concern with names and what they signify looms large in the text of *Vita Nuova*, colouring the symbolism and semantics of the narrative, and is reflected in the use of language itself. As with

Monna Innominata, Dante's work is one (though not to such an extent as Christina Rossetti's cycle) where action takes a second place to meditation. The speaker returns to contemplation of names and their consequents;

And by ... these thoughts I was so sorely assailed
that I was like unto him who doubteth which path to take,
and wishing to go, goeth not. And if I bethought myself
to seek out some point at the which all these paths might
be found to meet, I discerned but one way... (57)

The 'one way' which the speaker strives to attain is the path of truth, the position of stability, finally resolved as total certitude in the text, proceeding from an orthodox and dogmatically held faith in a deicentric cosmos, with God, the ultimate ordering principle, is accepted without challenge. So, in the very first sonnet of the *Vita Nuova*, this desired state of order is optimistically invoked;

To every heart which the sweet pain doth move,
And unto which these words may now be brought
For true interpretation and kind thought,
Be greeting in our Lord's name, which is Love. (58)

The 'true interpretation' clearly called for here is held to be a reading process directly consequent of an absolute faith in an omniscient, omnipotent deity - an idea which dominates the *Vita Nuova* and becomes a central motif in the text. Visions have 'true' discernible meanings (as do the sonnets which the poet himself decodes one by one in the work) as opposed to 'false' counterfeit readings, and mistaken interpretations of signs (of which the speaker possesses the 'true meaning' (41)) are

gently mocked in the narrative. It can be seen that, to a poet so critical of absolutism as is Christina Rossetti, this theme of the Dantean text is not one which *Monna Innominata* could possibly overlook. Dante's poetry assumes the principle that, interpreted correctly, the material signs of this world reflect with total certainty the truth which will be perceived directly in the kingdom of God. Subsequently, signification and interpretation do not become (as Christina Rossetti would have it) arbitrary processes, unfixed and shifting and capable of subversion by the intrusion of ideologies masquerading as truth, but rather equations with fixed, finite solutions available to the reader who knows the password. For Christina Rossetti, there is no password because there are no certainties, no absolutes (as we witness in all her writing, and as we will see from a close reading of *Monna Innominata* which follows); for Dante, the password is God and the absolute certitude which faith in God generates. Thus, for Dante, the move towards naming his Lady becomes an inevitable step - 'Names are the consequents of things' - since earthly referents must be unfailingly perceived as certain signs of heavenly essences. Making Beatrice Portinari,

wherein alone I found that beautitude
which is the goal of desire (59)

signify a spiritual ideal is, in the Dantean scheme, a sure consolidation of that ideal, never a reduction of the divine universality of the divine essence thereby signified. The sacred symbol of Beatrice is at once Beatitude and Beauty, on earth as in heaven. The naming might well be read by later poets as the first step towards subversion of the

ideal - tethering the divine in some way to the 'real' - but, for Dante's speaker it is not a subversion at all, as his complacency indicates. Thus, notably within a church (indeed beneath and as part of a holy structure) the *Vita Nuova* offers the reader a microcosmic image of its dogmatically adopted strategy towards representation. Beatrice is discovered at worship;

Now it fell on a day, that this most gracious creature
was sitting where words were to be heard of the Queen of
Glory; and I was in a place where mine eyes could behold
their beautitude: and betwixt her and me, in a direct line,
there sat another lady of pleasant favour; who looked
round at me many times, marvelling at my continued gaze
which seemed to have *her* for its object. And
many perceived that she thus looked; so that departing
thence, I heard it whispered after me, 'Look you to
what a pass *such a lady* hath brought
him;' and in saying this they named her who had been
midway between the most gentle Beatrice and mine eyes.
Therefore I was reassured, and knew that for that day
my secret had not become manifest. Then immediately it
came to my mind that I might make use of this lady
as a screen to the truth... By her means I kept my
secret concealed till some years were gone over... (60)

Dante, who knows exactly to whom his gaze refers, is incredulous at, and gently mocks the error of the observers who misread the image before them; this accurately reflects the attitude of the whole work towards certainty of reference where the correlation of signifier and signified are concerned. Of the same self-congratulatory nature is the playful toying with the implied speaker of the lyric in some of the later sonnets of the series, where words are

disguised ... so as to seem to be speaking
of another ... in such sort that [the sonnet] might
seem to be spoken by this friend of mine. (61)

Similarly, the speaker toys with notions of the self as divisible, only in the knowledge that, within the terms of this text at least, these elements are ultimately reconcilable as components of a repeatedly proffered unitary subjectivity. The clue lies in the language; the speaker's boast that he can 'make [himself] into two' as a literary conceit forms a simultaneous recognition that he is wholly in control of a divisible unit, his stable self.

In this sonnet, I make myself into two, according
as my thoughts were divided one from the other.
The one part I call Heart, that is appetite;
the other, Soul, that is, reason; and I tell what
one saith to the other. (62)

This whole operation of division stands governed by the repeated 'I' figure, forcefully guarding the claim of the unified self, which dominates the intellectually playful juxtaposition of 'Heart' and 'Soul' undertaken by the complacent poet here. These experiments with notions of representation are alluded to locally and fleetingly (knowingly, smugly even) in a work whose overall perspective negates the possibility of 'truth' ever being misread. At one point in the *Vita Nuova*, the speaker decides to use the 'screen to the truth' woman of the church as a decoy, in order that his 'true' love for Beatrice might not be discovered. But this plot backfires, and it becomes obvious that Beatrice herself is unaware of Dante's real affections (the potential for misreading is all around the speaker, yet never within him). Distressed (at the errant interpretative powers of others) the speaker falls weeping to sleep in his chamber. Love personified shortly appears to him

in a dream, also weeping and the words addressed to the poet by this vision are crucial to the methodology of the poetry itself.

My son, it is time for us to lay aside
our counterfeiting ... I am as the centre of a circle,
to the which all parts of the circumference bear an
equal relation: but with thee it is not thus. (63)

The vision (of Love, which is the governing divine principle in the Dantean scheme) warns the speaker of the perils of 'counterfeiting', the danger of taking images to be truths, and advises him of the importance of stability and the need for a 'centre' by which all other elements in a system may be held in governable relation. In the *Vita Nuova* as a whole, God functions as this ordering principle, rendered as such a potent device that all meaning generated by this dogmatically proffered certitude is held to be irrevocable 'truth' by the terms of the stable system from which it proceeds.

The modern French philosopher Jacques Derrida has linked the principle of 'coherence' with the concept of a 'centered system' such as that generated in the Dantean text (with the radical difference that he does not call this centre God). He describes the kind of interpretative centre required for such a system in functional terms which are appropriate (and it is to this important point that I wish later to refer the text of *Monna Innominata*) for describing what happens in the ABSENCE of such a centre as well;

... it has always been thought that the
centre, which is by definition unique, constituted
that very thing within a structure which while governing

the structure, escapes structurality ... The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. (64)

Dante's God fulfills these conditions. Transcending the temporal, the divine ordering principle becomes, in the Dantean text, an absolute guarantee of meaning and certitude. The pervasive spiritual presence saturates Dante's lyric poetry with a guarantee of meaning as the all encompassing absences in Christina Rossetti's writings function to abnegate any condition of certainty or stability of meaning in the text. The naming of Beatrice within the terms of the *Vita Nuova* and the system of signification promoted on those terms becomes just one more certitude amidst a pattern of similar guarantees of intelligibility. The text becomes tautological: the naming therein cannot be questioned and in its comfortable conveyance of closure represents a confirmation of the unshakeable stability of the linguistic and semantic system from which it proceeds. It is this self-satisfying tendency in the language of Dantean poetry which Christina Rossetti rejects in *Monna Innominata* at a poetic level, simultaneously denying the authority of the unsubverted male poetic tradition at literal level.

In the poetry of Petrarch, a dramatic shift in sensibility from that outlined above and characterised as Dantean may be detected. This is why Christina Rossetti locates these two poets as a starting point in her own deconstruction of poetic tradition, *Monna Innominata*. Alexander Dunlop has summarised the difference of approach as follows.

... whereas Dante had been able to sublimate his passion for his lady Beatrice in his love for God, Petrarch admits no such transcendent revolution. The love of Laura and the Love of God remain in tension and the *Rime* record the effects of that tension on the lover over time. The fundamental Petrarchan tension is ultimately that between a God-centred and a self-centred universe. The only resolution is renunciation of one of these centres ... (65)

If a fundamental (if not *the* fundamental) intention of the lyric writings of Dante might be said to be the promotion of certitude and stability on all planes - be they symbolic, narrative or linguistic - then one finds no such strategy running through the Petrarchan lyric text. Instead, one detects a distinct air of unease with language, with signifiers and their endurance - the principle of intelligibility is shaken and uncertain in Petrarch's writings. Petrarch's autobiographical *Letter To Posterity* opens timidly with an awkward but revealing reference to naming;

You may, perhaps, have heard tell of me, though even this is doubtful, since a poor and insignificant name like mine will hardly have travelled far in space or time ... (66)

This admission heralds a general lack of trust in the stability of linguistic forms which pervades Petrarch's work. It is a prominent mistrust, a lack of confidence which is reflected in the poet's unusually fragmented employment of pronomination. This tendency may be witnessed in lines from the opening lyric of the *Canzoniere*, the sequence of verses Petrarch is best remembered for which he wrote, ordered and revised between 1335 and his death in 1374;

O you who hear within these scattered verses
the sound of sighs with which I fed my heart
in my first errant youthful days when I
in part was not the man I am today ... (67)

The language of the poetry, with its displacement of the 'I' pronominal reference - 'I ... was not ... I' - conveys a strong interest in the possible non-fixity of identity. In similar fashion, there are many instances elsewhere in the *Rime* where both lover and addressee are referred to (in the Italian) as first person singular subjunctive, again blurring certainty as to identity as constructed by language. All this would seem to indicate a conception of the signifying possibilities of language which is far removed from that promoted in the Dantean lyric. Petrarch's awkward inscription of the name Laura (or 'Laureta') into the fifth sonnet of the *Canzoniere* in semi-anagrammatical form (68), constructing a manner of intellectual word game within the poetry, further marks a conscious disruption of set patterns of signification which, one feels, would have no place in the strategy of Dante's verses. Of course, this is not to say that, in Petrarch's lyrics, centres of intelligibility are deconstructed in the same way (as I will show later) they repeatedly are in *Monna Innominata*, but rather to illustrate the shifting conception of language which distinguishes Petrarch's writings from those of Dante. Petrarch's poetry appears in part to play out one theory of language and interpretation, that enacted and elaborated in the mediaeval texts whose other conventions Petrarch persistently evokes. The linguistic principles evinced by the *Canzoniere* function in a manner markedly dissimilar from those characterising Dantean poetics, where signs and that which they signify can be accurately related to each

other with reference to the common centre, or principle of intelligibility that is the divine meta-presence. Petrarch's poetry, I would argue, has lost the absolute confidence which the Dantean text placed in this divine presence; instead, the *Canzoniere* gently acknowledges the possibility of the absence of a principle of intelligibility and demonstrates, in that crucial absence, the impossibility of maintaining the integrity of the signifiers which construct the poetry. (It is, ultimately, this shift in sensibility - the first in a series of subversions later to be echoed in the sonnets of receptive writers like Spenser, Drayton and Shakespeare - which Christina Rossetti picks up on in *Monna Innominata*.) In his paper 'Petrarch's Conception Of The Dark Ages' (69), Theodore Mommsen concludes that, whereas Dante's world conception might be epitomised by the question 'What else is history, if not the praise of *God*?' (the notion of a stable deicentric system), Petrarch's view could be rhetorically set out as 'What else is history, but the praise of *Rome*?' The substitution of Roman glory for Christian redemption as the central event in history appears to govern Petrarch's inversion and also becomes a subversion from within of the mediaeval mode of thought that it counters. Dante's God fulfilled the Derridean conditions requisite for an all-encompassing central principle of intelligibility. Ancient Rome, on the other hand, most definitely does not meet those conditions. As evinced in the *Rime*, the Petrarchan conception of Rome sees it as only a part of the totality of history - of *Temporal* origin and end. Because it is located entirely within the system (of temporal history) there is no transcendent reason for privileging the idea of Rome above any other element of that system and such elevation is therefore necessarily

arbitrary (70). A distinction pertains between historical Rome (the Rome of Empire) and Rome the eternal city (Papal Rome, to which men and women made pilgrimages in the Middle Ages). As the Holy City and the seat of Imperial Power, Rome is an inherently ambiguous presence - the place of ruins and the work of time, and yet the place of Christ's Church, the place of eternity. Two oppositional ideas of Rome pertain. Used as a principle of intelligibility, an element such as Rome generates meanings, but the authority or certainty of these meanings is lost. This collapse of stability is (unlike that consciously enacted by the poetry of Christina Rossetti) detrimental to Petrarch's attempt to construct a coherent system of imagery and signification. In the sixteenth lyric of the Canzoniere, this flaw is highlighted in the brief narrative telling of an 'old ... dear father' who leaves his family to search for spiritual confirmation;

The old man takes his leave, white-haired and pale,
of the sweet place where he filled out his age
and leaves his little family, bewildered,
beholding its dear father disappear;

and then, dragging along his ancient limbs
throughout the very last days of his life,
helping himself with goodwill all he can,
broken by years, and wearied by the road,

he comes to Rome, pursuing his desire,
to look upon the likeness of the One
he hopes to see again up there in Heaven... (71)

The old man's pilgrimage is to Rome, proffered by the Petrarchan lyric as a centre about which meaning may be generated. Yet the pilgrim's unfulfilled desire is to attain an order of stability through Heavenly redemption. Two conflicting principles of intelligibility - Roman glory

and Christian faith - are operating here and each functions to negate the coherence of the other system. The old man's quest is doomed to failure and non-attainment of 'truth' (or meaning) because he is caught between two opposing views of the world, each only capable of offering certainty on its own terms, neither able to cope with the terms of the other. Thus, certainty of reference is lost as individual components signify different ends in each opposing quarter. The lyric ends on a note of despair;

Just so, alas, sometimes I go, my lady,
searching as much as possible in others
for your true, your desirable form.

In the Dantean lyric, the search for truth was guaranteed success at every turn; for Petrarch, absolutes are impossible as one generation of meaning intrudes upon the next, offering an awkward plurality where certainty is desired. Petrarch's use of Ancient Rome as the centre of his historical structure functions, in fact, - despite its being the place of the quest - to decentre and destabilise the signifying system thereby established (since the nominal centre cannot possess absolute authority), resulting in a breakdown of the process of signification itself. It is the devout promotion of certainty in Dante and its collapse into the lack of absolutes in Petrarch, and their difference of implication, which makes these two writers unquestionably relevant to the poetics of *Monna Innominata* and the attitude to matters of signification contained therein.

III

Giving the traditionally silent beloved woman a voice, thereby producing sharp disturbances in the conventions of love poetry, *Monna Innominata* works more than a simple Sapphonic sexual inversion. The subversion of the male-female polarity, its breaking of woman's silence and consequent re-addressing of the codes of love lyric - all of these function on an acutely subtle subtextual level. Everything to do with Christina Rossetti's sonnet cycle is deeper than meets the eye. It is not a simple poem by any means; it advances by a subtle process of thematic repetition and variation effected in a manner seemingly restrained but, in actuality, rigorously controlled. The bold invocation of Dante and Petrarch, as we have seen, works not only to mark out the tradition in which *Monna Innominata* sits with revolutionary aspect, but also to focus attention upon the more complex semantic and linguistic issues at stake in the 'Sonnet Of Sonnets'. By taking as a starting point our close examination of the poetics of the two Italian poets, their similarities and essential differences, we can usefully examine the strategy of Christina Rossetti's cycle towards language and signification. The strategy located in this manner, it will be seen, is one coincident with that found elsewhere in the work of Christina Rossetti. *Monna Innominata* is the most intellectually informed of all Rossetti's literary productions; its critical preface indicates that it is calculated in its methods (and yet it remains an impassioned plea at the plainest

thematic level). Furthermore, the intellectually provocative register of *Monna Innominata* makes it also the one poem in the Rossetti canon which *openly* admits and confirms the position symbolically adopted towards male tradition and ideology highlighted by this thesis in other works of the poet.

We have noted how significant are the references made by Christina Rossetti to Dante and Petrarch in her note to *Monna Innominata*. She also refers directly, perhaps semi-humorously not giving her a name, to 'the Great Poetess of our own day and nation' Elizabeth Barrett Browning (*Works*, p. 58). The poetical relationship between Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61) is a complex one worthy of more sustained study than has hitherto been attempted in the area. Antony Harrison has made out a brief, but persuasive case for Barrett Browning being of much greater influence on the youthful Rossetti's verses than has usually been admitted, arguing that Christina Rossetti consistently

had [Barrett] Browning in mind even at
the beginning of her poetic career. (72)

It is true, moreover, that Christina Rossetti was invited to make a biographical study of Mrs Browning for the popular *Eminent Women* series, edited by John Ingram. Eventually discouraged by Robert Browning's reputed refusal to endorse the venture, Christina Rossetti never wrote the life, but her initial comments upon being offered the project show the interest Barrett Browning held for her.

I should write with enthusiasm of that great

poetess and (I believe) lovable woman, whom I was never,
however, so fortunate as to meet. (73)

However, in the prefatory remarks to *Monna Innominata*, the *Sonnets From The Portuguese* written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning during her courtship with Robert Browning (composed 1845-6) and published, after their marriage, in 1850, are criticised for having more to do with 'fancy' than 'feeling' due to the poetess's 'happy ... circumstances'. What incensed Christina Rossetti about her contemporary's sonnet sequence was undoubtedly the sense of an opportunity missed. 'Happy' circumstances or not, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cycle is pervaded by a comfortable passivity which, unlike *Monna Innominata* (published twenty years after Barrett Browning's death), does nothing to address the inadequate presentation of woman in the conventional, phallogenic amatory lyric. In fact, the *Sonnets From The Portuguese*, in their stereotypical presentation of the male-female relationship within the verses, actively condone the masculine tradition Christina Rossetti persistently sought to subvert. No wonder Christina Rossetti regarded the 'Portuguese Sonnets' as a letdown. Elizabeth Barrett Browning gives woman a voice but then lets her use it only in the praise of the established male tradition which hitherto kept her silent - passing over a vital opportunity, from a radically *female* position, further to expose the canon's one-sidedness in the manner of the subversive lyrics of Drayton and Shakespeare. In contrast to the prefatory remarks which open *Monna Innominata* on a note directly antagonistic to the unsubverted masculine poetic tradition, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets open with the speaker casting herself directly *in* that tradition;

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished for years...
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life ... (74)

The speaker here is able to find a frame for her own experience 'in his antique tongue' - that is, within the terms of an unquestioned masculine tradition. The conventions established in the male love lyric are held adequately to articulate woman's vision as presented in *Sonnets From The Portuguese*. Nothing could be further away from the view expounded in Christina Rossetti's poetry, which repeatedly finds male ordered discourse wholly incapable of promoting an equitable view of female identity. The speaker of the 'Portuguese Sonnets', paradoxically, uses the voice which her sonnet cycle allows her to state that she is content, in the relationship with her lover, with being silent;

Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief ... (75)

Such a maxim, with the happy submission it implies, would be anathema to Christina Rossetti, yet subjugation to the 'lordly' and 'conquering' male addressee is the dominant theme in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets. Christina Rossetti's cycle attempts an attack upon and a recasting of male courtly love poetry, whilst Barrett Browning's sequence is a faint-hearted echo of masculine dominance. Dorothy Mermin (76) would have us believe otherwise - framing a case for Barrett Browning as a feminist involved in 'painfully dislocating' masculine poetic conventions, whereas Christina Rossetti, we are advised, 'does define

herself within the terms set by male poets' by virtue of the fact that she uses Dantean and Petrarchan epigrams to precede the sonnets of *Monna Innominata*! Mermin has evidently never heard of recontextualisation, nor of subversion from within. Her study exemplifies a tendency which has plagued criticism of Christina Rossetti's writing as much as the biographical determinism commented upon earlier; Mermin (herself heavily swayed by biography in her estimation of the 'Portuguese Sonnets') takes writing at face value and, consequently, is duped by an overly literal appreciation of the poetry. Writing poetry within the Victorian age, poetry published by men and, by and large, critically deciphered by men, it is not surprising that literal levels often belie that which is operating beneath the surface. Christina Rossetti was probably grateful to be able to pull the wool over the eyes of Victorian male critics when offering up such a feminist tract as *Monna Innominata* for their approval. I do not think she would be so grateful to discover, exactly a hundred years on, that a (female) sophisticated twentieth century critic was still not able to see through the wool. In the light of the above detailed study of Dantean and Petrarchan poetics, not forgetting the dissatisfaction evinced at the *Sonnets From The Portuguese*, I now propose to offer a detailed, close reading of *Monna Innominata*, firstly at a literal, thematic level and latterly in terms of the attitude towards language displayed by the poem's intertextual and symbolic subtext.

The first four sonnets in the series of fourteen - a 'Sonnet Of Sonnets' - map the cycle's opening thematic movement, an expression of the speaker's longing for conjunction with her absent lover on a decidedly

physical (though never overtly sexual) level. The first sonnet laments the lover's absence in plain terms, whilst the second verse articulates the desire to rekindle memories of that 'first moment of your meeting me' (II, 2). Sonnet III, reiterating the loved one's current absence on a physical level, conveys a yearning for 'happy dreams' since now 'only in a dream are we at one', concluding the sonnet somewhat melodramatically;

If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake,
To die were surely sweeter than to live,
Though there be nothing new beneath the sun. (III, 12-14)

Notably, up until the fourth sonnet of the cycle, there is no definite indication as to whether or not (beyond the realms of the speaker's imagination and 'dreams') the relationship under discussion is one which has ever been mutually reciprocated. Sonnet IV clarifies the picture by giving an commentary upon the actual fortunes experienced by the lovers in the course of their romance.

I loved you first: but afterwards your love,
Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song
As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove. (IV, 1-3)

This initially competitive exchange of affection, with love assessed in terms of 'weights and measures' is reconciled in this sonnet's sestet where unity (now on earth, not just 'In happy dreams') is achieved by the speaker and her loved one.

With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
For one is both and both are one in love:
Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';
Both have the strength and both the length thereof,

Both of us, of the love which makes us one. (IV, 10-14)

Harrison emphasises the role which the imagination has played in achieving this plainly expressed instance of secular unity, emphatically marking the end of the first quartet of sonnets.

Such union has been achieved, as far as the
reader can tell, exclusively through the exercise of the
poetic imagination, in an operation reminiscent of Keats's
comparison of that faculty's workings to Adam's dream :
'He awoke and found it truth'. (77)

As soon as the 'truth' of this unity is achieved, however, it is immediately disrupted by the subjugation, in the second quartet of sonnets, of the lovers' secular union before God's higher presence. In the fifth sonnet, the speaker recommends that the 'noble service' of her addressee be directed not towards herself but wholly towards the divinity. The sixth sonnet goes some way towards reinstating the notion of present unity so recently disturbed by the speaker's devotional proclamations, but it is now a notion modified by the declaration of the poet's ultimate dependence upon holy direction.

Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke -
I love you as you would have me, God the most;
Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost,
Nor with Lot's wife cast back a faithless look,
Unready to forgo what I forsook...
... Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
I cannot love you if I love not Him,
I cannot love Him if I love not you. (VI, 1-5, 12-14)

This dualistic denouement (characteristic of the ending of Rossetti's lyrics) and the dilemma which it offers up for debate seem quickly resolved by the initial implications of sonnet VII, where the speaker, seeking Christian 'comfort in his Book', presents an image of equality and unity in a heavenly afterlife.

'Love me, for I love you' - and answer me,
'Love me, for I love you': so shall we stand
As happy equals in the flowering land
Of love, that knows not a dividing sea. (VII, 1-4)

The eighth poem of the fourteen which make up *Monna Innominata*, marks the central moment of the cycle as well as its turning point (though the geometric structuring of the sequence is far from simple and is analysed in detail later in this chapter). Somewhat unexpectedly, this pivotal sonnet offers an enigmatic and sensual (indeed Keatsian) version of the biblical fable of the Jewish woman Esther - who, in a scenario prefiguring the martyrdom of Christ, used her feminine intuition (and her beauty) to outwit her husband for the good of her race - employed here to introduce a call to divinity from the speaker for heavenly blessing of her love on earth.

If I might take my life so in my hand,
And for my love to Love put up my prayer,
And for love's sake by Love be granted it! (VIII, 12-14)

On this note, with a deliberately devotional overview of the earthly union achieved by parts in the preceeding verses, the octave of the sequence concludes. Immediately, as the sestet is entered, the tone of

the work shifts considerably. Gone is the fervent optimism of the eighth sonnet, as the ninth opens on an entirely different theme, recognising the tension between the opposing - secular and spiritual - versions of unity outlined in the cycle's octave.

Thinking of you, and all that was, and all
That might have been and now can never be,
I feel your honoured excellence, and see
Myself unworthy of the happier call... (IX, 1-4)

The earlier mood of charged expectancy and the sense of immanent relief it insinuated into the text is deftly replaced by a doleful atmosphere of ascetic renunciation as the speaker now rejects the earthly communion (and thus the ideology of male sonneteers who persistently seek such a physical union) which was so energetically outlined in the closing lines of sonnet IV. Yet, for all this seeming despondency, the female poet still finds solace in the notion of a spiritual union to supersede that physical conjunction possible in this life. This idea is beautifully and plaintively expressed in the sestet of the tenth sonnet;

Life wanes: and when love folds his wings above
Tired hope, and less we feel his conscious pulse,
Let us go fall asleep, dear friend in peace:
A little while, and age and sorrow cease;
A little while, and life reborn annuls
Loss and decay and death, and all is love. (X, 9-14)

If the *Monna Innominata* sequence were to end at this point, then the orthodox Christian moral of the work would be clear and emphatic: *vanitas mundi* is proven a mere shadow of the eternal peace to be enjoyed in the afterlife. But this is not to be: the cycle continues,

further highlighting the speaker's tendency towards an unsettled mood by means of the progressively metaphysical series of renunciations which occupies sonnets XI to XIII. The 'So much for you: but what for me...?' theme of sonnet V is directly revisited in the eleventh stanza, now with distinctly sarcastic feminist overtones;

Many in aftertimes will say of you
'He loved her' - while of me what will they say?
Not that I loved you more than just in play,
For fashion's sake as idle women do. (XI, 1-4)

This sonnet introduces an abrupt contradiction of the idealised, religious persuasiveness of its predecessor. Even in the afterlife, the speaker now suspects, there may be room for difference;

... we knew
Of love and parting in exceeding pain,
Of parting hopeless here to meet again,
Hopeless on earth, and heaven is out of view. (XI, 5-8)

The pressing desire for unity, and therefore certitude, which has become controller of the thematic rhythms of the cycle, is again frustrated as knowledge of stability, which has seemed all but achieved more than once already in the sequence, is again acknowledged potentially to be 'out of view'. Once more faced with a decentred world view and the resultant loss of intelligibility so far as the love relationship is concerned, sonnet XII seeks to reaffirm the speaker's recently shaken confidence in the love-bond between herself and her beloved, this time by means of a further ascetic renunciation.

If there be any one can take my place
And make you happy whom I grieve to grieve,
Think not that I can grudge it, but believe
I do commend you to that nobler grace,
That readier wit than mine, that sweeter face... (XII, 1-5)

'Your pleasure is my pleasure', affirms the speaker, and this new version of equality, reached by the sequence of reappraisals and renunciations, is the predominant theme here, as, in a by now predictable attempt to reinforce this sense of oneness, sonnet XIII (directly echoing sonnet V) commends the lovers' relationship entirely to 'God's hand... Whose knowledge foreknew every plan we planned.' Again, though, at the very moment that certitude seems to have been reached, the by now familiar tone of self-doubt interrupts the speaker's contentment;

Searching my heart for all that touches you,
I find there only love and love's goodwill
Helpless to help and impotent to do,
Of understanding dull, of sight most dim;
And therefore I commend you back to Him
Whose love your love's capacity can fill. (XIII, 9-14)

Sonnet XIV completes the *Monna Innominata* sequence on a resigned and dolorous tone, admitting the mutability of existence, as illustrated by the cycle and the terms of the love relationship outlined therein, in a manner which is resigned to instability - 'Youth gone and beauty, what remains of bliss?' - yet still retaining a sense of the speaker's own dignity;

I will not bind fresh roses in my hair,
To shame a cheek at best but little fair, -
Leave youth his roses, who can bear a thorn, -
I will not seek for blossoms anywhere... (XIV, 4-7)

The repeated negatives here - 'I will not... I will not...' - express a self-conscious refusal to oppose the mutability and change which have disputed any notion of stability and certitude throughout the sonnet sequence. The cycle does end with a silent passivity, but it is a considered stance, where silence becomes the most poignant statement the speaker can make. The speaker of Rossetti's sonnets, initially craving a physical union with her loved one, eventually constructs a desire for communion on a spiritual plane (revealed at first in 'happy dreams') which will, she hopes, be complete and eternal and mark the perfectability of the self. God is proffered as a potential centre of intelligibility with the power to unite and yet to divide: as such, His potency is emblematic of that which informs the text of *Monna Innominata*. Consequently, the speaker's embracing of mutability, accepting the inevitability of instability on earth and contrasting with this the eternally stable afterlife, is not just an admission of defeat (in terms of the cycle's quest, and that of all Rossetti's early poetry), but also a blissful refuge from the painful quest for earthly knowledge which traditionally forms the basis of any love-relationship, as expressed in lyric verse. The speaker of *Monna Innominata*'s relinquishment of profane indulgence is, I hope to show, simultaneous with Rossetti's own withdrawal, as a writer, into the sphere of exclusively devotional work.

A reading of *Monna Innominata* such as that given above is enough to alert us to the fact that there is more going on in the poem than meets the eye. Many times in the cycle the poetry reflects upon 'song' to such an extent that it becomes a critique of its own function. The

intellectual journey taken by the speaker of Rossetti's sequence is one which involves areas of meaning beyond the surface literal level of the poem. In its symbolic analysis of language, ideology and meaning, the work enacts some highly sophisticated intertextual, semantic and linguistic manoeuvres which it is now my purpose to examine in detail.

IV

The attitude of Christina Rossetti's 'Sonnet Of Sonnets' towards matters of overall signifying potential (and thus poetry and poetic tradition) is a highly complex one. The poem repeatedly plays out the possibilities of the systems of intelligibility which (as writing, in a tradition of other writing) it is capable of promoting. Notions of context are questioned and the frames of reference these rely upon for the production of meaning are shown to be far from stable. Because of this approach, the text forbids itself any easy closure - *Monna Innominata* is not an easy poem to read nor to interpret. The sequence operates not around, but within systems of difference, establishing so-called 'certitudes' only to challenge them in terms of the contradictions they imply when recontextualised. In short, like *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress*, the text continually interrogates and deconstructs its own premises - its motto could be that line from another Christina Rossetti poem we

have cited throughout this study, 'For all that was but showed what all was not' *Works*, p. 64) - finally exhausting itself in a silence both ambiguous and provocative which forewarns of the passive embrace of orthodox Christian piety Rossetti turned to in her later writings.

It is worth reiterating here the quotation from Derrida cited earlier in the argument.

...it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre. The concept of a centred structure - although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science - is contradictorily coherent. (78)

Monna Innominata, more than any other single work of Christina Rossetti, addresses the literary inter-relationships inscribed in all poetic texts between a notion of the self and its history or story, and an understanding of language which raises problems concerning any and all narrative representations. The resultant questioning of that which tradition has held to be stable, raising issues around the signifying potential of language (and the structure which obtains between subjects and predicates, selves and narratives) greatly accentuates the peculiarly non-narrative element which is always operative whenever Christina Rossetti enacts the attempt to narrate a story. I have outlined the

similarities and differences between the linguistic principles constructing some of the Dantean and Petrarchan texts alluded to by Christina Rossetti in her prefatory remarks to the fourteen sonnets of *Monna Innominata*. I believe that the Rossetti sequence reveals an insistence upon the priority of poetic relationships in its production of significance and hence in its presentation (or rather its investigation) of poetic tradition and literary history. In an avowed attempt to write as a woman - to explore a manner of discourse outwith the phallogentric 'masculine' register of the poetic tradition she aims to subvert yet extend - Christina Rossetti is forced to consider the signifying possibilities of the male-ordered discourse, particularly that of Dante and Petrarch, which formed the troubador courtly love-lyric tradition. Consequently, I read Christina Rossetti's poetry, and *Monna Innominata* in particular, in response to, as well as to arrive at an understanding of, certain formal and stylistic features which seem to me motivated by a recognition (or decision) that the signifying possibilities of the male mode of discourse are no longer imaginatively available for a woman wishing to write from a woman's point of view. *Monna Innominata* plays out various notions of the signifying capacities of discourse, displaying a sophisticated degree of awareness of the nature of centering principles of intelligibility, their power and treatment in the texts of Dante and Petrarch.

The first sonnet of the fourteen regenerates the Petrarchan anima/-us model and identifies a main theme of the sequence in its attention to the issues of 'love' and 'song' and their psychological relationship. Its opening quatrain, wistfully and plainly phrased, is a familiar device in

the poetry of Christina Rossetti. On one level a lover's lament over the absence of a loved one, the lines may also steer attention towards another absence - the absence of the poetic voice heralding (as it did at the beginning of *The Prince's Progress*) the desire for artistic fruition.

Come back to me, who wait and watch for you:-
Or come not yet, for it is over then,
And long it is before you come again,
So far between my pleasures are and few. (I, 1-4)

The lament for the lover becomes the summons to the song which is to crystallise and preserve the lament. As with 'Echo' and many other of Christina Rossetti's lyric pieces, the rhythmic intoning and progression of monosyllables create a sense of charged invocation; these opening lines function, in the post-Romantic internalised sense, as a modified self-reflexive summons to the traditional poetic 'Muse'. Part of the success of this device, then, relies upon the intended fusion of poetic inspiration/object, where the addressee of the verse becomes the source of energy behind the song, the *raison d'être* of the lyric both narratively and metaphorically. In striving to find a discourse that is free from the patriarchal ideology of that traditional to love poetry, a main objective of the poetry must be to come to terms with the female psyche, somehow to estimate and define female identity. The traditional poetic Muse, - that of the masculine line of literature - even when acknowledged as metaphor for an internalised operation, is always read as being a female form. This 'anima' figure qualifies as a concentration of the spiritual and creative capacity within every man's self. In a

forthright attempt to write from a feminine stance, Christina Rossetti must here disturb such sexual role-allocation and, still in the service of an invocatory summons, the nature and essence of her desire as manifest in this poetic form is revealed.

For one man is my world of all the men
This wide world holds: O love, my world is you.
(I, 7-8)

Inverting the conventional notion of the energy source governing all courtly love poetry, the speaker offers a concise and clear statement concerning the idealised conception - the 'idea' - she has of the object of her desire. The sense of strain in the text here is also significant: because of, for example, the social constraints established by a patriarchal society, it is difficult, on every level, for female sexuality freely to be acted out. The 'hope' of the poet speaker, the yearning for fruition of the creative impulse, is said to hang,

...waning, waxing, like a moon
Between the heavenly days on which we meet:
(I, 12-13)

It is apt, if we are to read this opening sonnet as a subtle musaic invocation, that the image of the waning and waxing 'moon', a symbol (also used in *The Prince's Progress*) of fecundity and creativity (and, also, *mutability*), is associated with the desire for a meeting, the conjunction of poetic voice and inspiration. The 'days on which we meet' - when a conjunction is achieved, a union effected - are seen as 'heavenly', that is not of earthly concord but upon a divinely inspired,

spiritual plane. Later in the sequence, the addressed lover figure is described as

...my heart's heart, and you who are to me
More than myself myself... (IV, 1-2)

This unusual and deliberately awkward grammatical construction conveys the speaker's sense of strain whilst deftly reinforcing the notion of an internalised conception of the absent 'loved one'. A similar reinforcement of this idea lies in the avoidance throughout *Monna Innominata* of the traditional descriptive element essential to the courtly love poem, the exaltation of the lady's beauty which was seen as a direct reflection of divine goodness. Typically for Christina Rossetti, the unnamed male addressed in these verses is never afforded any degree of external delineation. No hint is given of the man's appearance. In this manner, all the negotiations and interchanges effected in the course of the cycle are operating on a psychological level. Indeed, visualisation of the lover, a necessity in the poetry of Dante and Petrarch, is only possible on a dream level, and even this seems to come as something of a shock;

In happy dreams I hold you full in sight,
I blush again who waking look so wan...
(III, 5-6)

Such exposure to the visual manifestation of the abstract mental ideal becomes more than arresting in terms of the rest of the strategy of *Monna Innominata*. The playful and ironic pun of 'wan'/'one' imports the

idea (just how relevantly will be clear from the detailed reading of the third sonnet) that the waking from dreams of the speaker is actually a fall from a desired state of unity. This lighthearted punning, with its hint of sarcastic understatement, is very uncharacteristic of Christina Rossetti in a lyric such as this - although there are many such devices to be found in her ballads and children's writing - but it works well here, emphasising as it does the poet's ear for the fruitfulness of language. In contrast to the Dantean and Petrarch lyric, nowhere in the collection of sonnets does the speaker feel the need to look for or to posit from fancy an image in the likeness of the loved one. As the poetry itself becomes the written enshrinement of the impulse to create, the 'vision' of the text is turned inward and we are soon aware that a different pattern of signification is at work than that found in the Dantean and Petrarchan texts. Early in this opening sonnet, the speaker admits,

...when you come not, what I do I do
Thinking 'Now when he comes,' my sweetest 'when'...
(I, 5-6)

This 'Now/when' construction is repeated in the closing couplet of the sonnet and is interesting in its own sake as a means of grasping the methodology of this work so far as the approach to signification is concerned. In this first instance, the 'Now' - traditionally used in philosophy as the ultimate example of an unreliable signifier, since that time which it purports to denote is over before the signification can be received - of 'when he comes' is said to be 'my sweetest 'when''. This peculiarly experimental lifting of a linguistic semantic unit - 'my

sweetest 'when' - from immediate context, yet still kept within the broader poetic framework, represents an overt interest in the capacity of language momentarily to signify and thence hold connotation as retrospective value. (Simply put, this is temporal blurring of the subtlest form - time itself, for the speaker, refuses absolute guarantee of certainty (an idea developed specifically in sonnet II)). The Dantean epigraph to this opening sonnet, another example of a recontextualised unit of meaning, is translated by W. M. Rossetti (79) as

The day that they have said adieu
to their sweet friends. (Works, p. 462)

But in Christina Rossetti's exposition the 'friends' are words themselves and, as so often with her lyrics, this signals an immediate awareness of the poetry's own stance as such, as poetry. A recent commentator has, I think rightly, proposed of this Rossetti sequence that

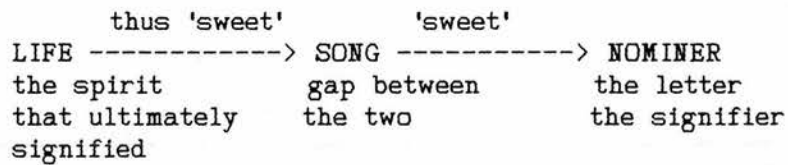
...sweetness gets attached to the words that are
talismans of the lover's presence ... her desire has
made them substitutes for the presence that is their
true signified. (80)

The last couplet of Sonnet I, recalling Keats' demand 'Where are the songs of spring?' in 'To Autumn' (1819), is, I think, crucial to an understanding of the strategy of the whole sequence to follow where these matters of literariness and signification are concerned (81).

Ah me, but where are now the songs I sang
When life was sweet because you called them sweet?
(I, 13-14)

The repeated 'now...when' construction again interests itself in questions of language and reference, here 'the songs I sang'. Like the loved one,

the 'songs' are absent here, and still in the service of a Muse invocation, these lines simultaneously exhibit a theory of signification and context. LIFE was 'sweet' not because IT was called 'sweet' by direct nomination (the Dantean notion of certitude of reference as displayed in the poetics of the *Vita Nuova*) but because the SONGS sung were 'called...sweet'. Thus a chain of signification is established;



Whilst asserting the primacy of the creative process as a means of defining love and the self, this conundrum begs the question of the relationship of 'truth' to (poetic) subjectivity. 'Song' generates the vision of transcendent 'love', whatever that vision becomes. All importantly, the 'gap' between that signified and its signifier is the SONG which the text itself invokes and stands as testimony to the fruition of this invocation. Hence, this 'song', *Monna Innominata*, explores that gap between letter and spirit both literally and on a subtle symbolic level. Poetry again becomes its own subject as Rossetti endeavours to construct a manner of poetry radically opposed to that traditionally found in the lyric, informed with a sophisticated consciousness of the implications of the very tradition it subverts.

The second sonnet of the *Monna Innominata* sequence upturns another convention of the male courtly love tradition. It provides an almost parodic exposition of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* LXI, which, with the speaker

seeking explicitly to pinpoint the exact moment of meeting, has the opening quatrain;

Oh blessed be the day, the month, the year,
the season and the time, the hour, the instant,
the gracious countryside, the place where I
was struck by those two lovely eyes that bound me...(82)

The Petrarch sonnet goes on to discuss, in poetry, 'the poetry / I scattered, calling out my lady's name', going on to bless 'all the paper upon which / I earn her fame'. Christina Rossetti's sonnet likewise deals with a first meeting and the recording of the impression made by the loved one, but the approach is somewhat different. Following on from the first sonnet of *Monna Innominata* more by way of tone than any narrative, causal progression, the subject matter of this woman's verse is still conceived of at an internalised, spiritual level and it is appropriate, then, that Sonnet II opens on a theme of temporal blurring, in direct contrast to the Petrarchan precedent.

I wish I could remember that first day,
First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
If bright or dim the season, it might be
Summer or Winter for aught I can say...
(II, 1-4)

The loss of certainty again as to external reference reinforces the notion that the text is to be read as self-reflexive - not a straightforward narrative tract, but a psychological exploration of the frame of mind of the poet-speaker. This quatrain alerts us to the fact that the experience the speaker is narrating here is agonisingly

ephemeral. The sonnet's insistence upon the absence of memory (compounding the absence of the loved one) is disturbingly un-Romantic and extremely effective. The use of verb tenses is especially significant. To qualify the instance of the 'first moment of your meeting me' as one single event from the past, the following tag clause would have to be 'it might HAVE BEEN / Summer or Winter...'. The usage of the present tense, 'it might be / Summer...' implies an ongoing issue, that this 'first moment' qualifies as a repeatable occurrence, one that has happened and may well happen again. If we accept a reading of this sequence which sees it in terms of an internalised exploration of processes of discourse formation, the development of a 'feminine' style of writing, then it is indeed appropriate that the 'first moment' of conception of the creative impulse is presented symbolically in this ambivalent manner - always an original urge, but one that may return. As the impulse is described in this quatrain, the quatrain itself forms monumental testimony to the association it describes. The rest of the sonnet is taken up with an investigation into ideas of writing, as the speaker attempts imaginatively to reconstruct an event which is absent from her memory and, hence, founded on uncertainties.

So unrecorded did it slip away,
So blind was I to see and to forsee,
So dull to mark the budding of my tree
That would not blossom yet for many a May.
If only I could recollect it, such
A day of days! I let it come and go
As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow... (II, 5-11)

There is a pained desire in these lines to record the creative impulse, a desire seen as natural and cast in images of a blossoming tree and

melted snow, themselves from the natural world. 'Unrecorded' a tree bud will grow into blossom whereas snow will simply thaw to a 'traceless' condition - furthering the dichotomic presentation at symbolic level, the conflicting images drawn from the same source - nature - emphasise the potential of the artistic impulse to progress to differing degrees of substantiality. And around all this recognition of the non-fixity, temporally and qualitatively, of the 'meeting' at psychological level, a broader theme of the sonnet is the actual passing of time and the uncertainty of identity with this passage. The urge to 'see and to forsee' is noted, whilst the speaker seeks to remember a 'moment' and later a 'touch', both insubstantial instances and, in the same vein, this sonnet seems to promote a vision of the individual identity as a concept rooted on insubstantiality. The Petrarchan epigram, which William Michael Rossetti translates as

I recur to the time when I first saw thee.

is an illustration of this tendency in the verse. The conditional clause demands a split in the subject of the whole sentence at grammatical level and this division must also be recognised in terms of semantic continuity. The 'I' seeks to 'recur' to a previous time occupied by a previous 'I' who is and yet is not the same presence as the 'I' who remembers. This division echoes the instability of personal pronouns in a text such as the Rossetti sonnet which deals with the recollection of former incidents. The alternation of 'I's in the Rossetti text is of a very sophisticated nature, especially when coupled with the temporal

blurring we have already noted. For example, still with the second sonnet;

If only I could recollect it, such
A day of days! I let it come and go
As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow...
(II, 9-11)

The modal construction 'If only I could recollect' functions, as did the opening statement of the sonnet, 'I wish I could remember', to deny certainty as to the temporality it describes. (We noted earlier that the actuality of the lovers' relationship is wholly unestablished at this stage.) The 'day of days' might be of time past or of an ongoing future sense. The deliberate choice of verb in 'I let it come and go', which could be past or present tense, confirms the desire to leave uncertain the temporal dimensions delineated. The enforced lack of correlation between the first person singular pronouns of this section make a stable poetic subjectivity impossible to deduce with any degree of reliability, even though, overriding all of this is the fact that the 'I' signifier is itself a constant. Such complexity behind the alternation of pronominal signifiers in their context highlights, in a very sophisticated manner, the unreliability of pronominal reference which is a marker illustrating the instability of personal identity through time. The shifting signification ultimately leaves direct referents 'unrecorded' in the terms of the fiction of the text; external 'truths' become indeed 'as traceless as a thaw of bygone snow'.

It seemed to mean so little, meant so much...
(II, 12)

Thus the speaker describes what is now an absence, an uncertainty, but this comment, with its pronouncement upon the unreliability of the status of any 'fixed' interpretation, could also be applied to the *Monna Innominata* cycle itself thus far, as it continues, acknowledging the uncertainty of its own poetics, symbolically reflecting its own particular linguistic strategies and the open possibility of a pluralistic reading. But, as was noted earlier, there is a keen desire within this text to move towards certainty and understanding at literal and psychological level, confirmed sharply by the exclamatory final couplet of this sonnet;

If only now I could recall that touch,
First touch of hand in hand - Did one but know!
(II, 13-14)

The speaker, fractured as the conception of her own identity has become during the course of this verse, still feels the drive towards a state of conjunction. It is notable that the state of harmony sought here, the 'touch of hand in hand' is a conjunction which itself may be performed alone by the single individual in the act of prayer, hence another 'heavenly' meeting, and as notable is the choice of personal pronoun - 'one' here and not 'I' - used directly after the imaging of the conjunction. The sonnet has focused itself upon an illustration of the instability of reference of the 'I' signifier and it closes with the desire for a state of being nominated by the pronoun 'one', denoting some kind of concord and unity to give reassurance to the text after the exhibition of uncertainty which has gone before. There are seven 'I's in the fourteen lines of Sonnet II, but the unit 'one' is, indeed, used only

once. The striving for 'one'-ness, for unity, comes to occupy much of the mid section of *Monna Innominata* bringing with it the related desire to find an adequate system of signification which will reflect the stability and likewise be able successfully to interpret it.

As an actual figure in the terms of the altogether vague narrative fiction offered by *Monna Innominata*, the male addressee, like the forgotten 'first moment of ... meeting', is never present, his immediate function is as an absence and all that this entails. Yet, as the source of the poetry, both dramatically and mentally, this non-presence is the element which gives inspiration and, at one level, a degree of inner coherence birth to the poetry itself. The poem cannot exist outside of the idea of the unnamed male and vice versa, the absent lover could not possibly exist outside the terms of the sonnet sequence. We have already noted the entire lack of visual description afforded to the addressee of these sonnets: he stands wholly as an idea (and an ideal) and thus the third sonnet considers a psychological framework which may subvert notions of 'actuality' and narrative causal connection - the 'dream' sphere. The speaker longs to remain in the realm of 'happy dreams', since the radiant presence (a kind of meta-presence in terms of the immediate narrative of the sequence) of this soul-mate there 'makes day of night'.

I dream of you, to wake: would that I might
Dream of you and not wake but slumber on;
Nor find with dreams the dear companion gone,
As, Summer ended, Summer birds take flight.
In happy dreams I hold you full in sight,
I blush again who waking look so wan;
Brighter than sunniest day that ever shone,
In happy dreams your smile makes day of night.

Thus only in a dream are we at one...

(III, 1-9)

Unity, promoted thus far in the cycle as necessary prerequisite for stability of reference, is the desired state here, and it may be found in the non-empirical world of the dream. And yet 'only in a dream' already betrays an admittance that the unity in that context is not the stable entity it may seem when viewed within a different context, from the point which, in describing the dream and the conjunction achieved therein, must itself be outwith that dream. 'I dream of you to wake:' says the speaker, and this is an essential point - the waking is necessary to an assessment of the dream from a position that is not of the dream itself. Thus the speaker desires to 'not wake but slumber on', but cannot, and in describing the dream process sets herself outside it, finding the unity only a fleeting image, 'the dear companion gone'. This admitted, the sonnet has negotiated the search for a centering principle only to find an image of stability full of contradictions. The desire to escape temporality by entering the dream sphere ironically culminates in a picture of harmony which is indeed ex-temporal but only in an unworkable sense since, viewed from the position of poet-subject established in this and the other sonnets, the dream can be only a fleeting, thus a temporal interlude. As a system of signification, the dream satisfies its own terms but cannot connect with those of the broader context demanded by the terms of the ongoing central narrative of *Monna Innominata*: thus, the sonnet presents a microcosmic image of the problematical process of recontextualisation investigated repeatedly by the intertextual nature of whole cycle. A self-satisfying image, with

solid internal balance, semantically and grammatically, and yet meaningless in any broader sense, confirms the failure of the speaker in the search for overall intelligibility;

Thus only in a dream we give and take
The faith that maketh rich who take or give...
(III, 10-11)

The strategy of this sonnet, then, has collapsed into the realisation that an ordering principle, to be useful, must be able to pass the test of recontextualisation. A fall into pessimism, 'To die were surely sweeter than to live', reinforces the tone of dissatisfaction with the progress of the argument felt by the speaker. The closing line seems particularly despairing and unenthusiastic.

Though there be nothing new beneath the sun.
(III, 14)

This line is itself a recontextualisation of a Biblical phrase and is worth quoting in original context by way of further illustrating the point reached at its placing in the Rossetti text. It is taken from the first chapter of *Ecclesiastes*, the section of the *Old Testament* most frequently alluded to in the poetry of Christina Rossetti.

8. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

9. That thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

10. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old

time, which was before us.

11. There is no remembrance of former things;
neither shall there be any remembrance of things
that are to come with those that shall come after.
(*Ecclesiastes*, i, 9-11)

'Man cannot utter it.' Similarly, the Rossetti text has been unable, thus far, to find a mode of utterance suited to the expression of a woman's way of 'seeing', a wholly 'feminine' discourse 'whereof it may be said, See, this is new?' Unsuccessful in its attempt to find a principle of intelligibility around which to posit the terms of a 'feminine' register, *Monna Innominata* cannot yet make order of the chaos it seeks to commit to signification and is thus caught up in a centreless state of indeterminacy where, indeed, 'that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.' Another strategy must be tried, and it is by this trial and error methodology (rather than by any predictable narrative continuity) that the Rossetti sequence moves forward in this, its early stages.

It is interesting and useful at this point to examine and define the structuring principles behind the ordering of the fourteen sonnets which make up *Monna Innominata*. On the evidence of a first reading, it would not be unfair to propose that the sonnets are very near to being set down in random succession. I have already noted the distinct lack, or rather *avoidance* of direct causal narrative linking; *Monna Innominata* is built around debate rather than plot. The speaker muses and sings her songs whilst the addressee stays absent throughout - this is the sum total of the 'action' of the sequence read as a dramatic narrative. This lack of external directives means that at this level any one of the

sonnets could be removed from the sequence and replaced at an alternative stage in the text with no disruption felt to the drama in progress. Whilst this is so, it must be acknowledged that the text comes to us in its set order, and, subtle as they may be, there will be reasons for the position of each sonnet in the cycle. Christina Rossetti addresses this issue herself in two letters. One is to Macmillan, dated 24th November 1886, and refers specifically to *Monna Innominata*;

I... make a point of refusing extracts, even
in the case of my Sonnet of Sonnets some of which
would fairly stand alone... (83)

Three years previously the author had been even more clear as to her position with regard to the notion of general structure, replying to an American anthology editor and, again, mentioning her 'Sonnet of Sonnets';

I do not mind which piece you select
subject only to your taking any piece in question
in its entirety; and my wish includes
your not choosing an independent
poem which forms part of a series or group, -
not (for instance)... one Sonnet of 'Monna Innominata'.
Such compound work often has a connection
(very often) which is of interest to the author
and which [the reader] an editor gains nothing
by discarding. (84)

Christina's father had delved deeply into the numerological implications of the structuring of Dante's writing (in particular, the *Vita Nuova*), and it is clear from the above statements that she had inherited this concern (85). *Monna Innominata* is pointedly subtitled a 'Sonnet Of Sonnets' with all the formal implications that this description entails -

i.e. that there be fourteen constituent units, an octave leading to a volta, and a concluding sestet. Structured deliberately in this very literary form, it is clear that an awareness of the stance of the poetry as poetry, as writing, is very much at work. The symbolic implications of *Monna Innominata*, I propose, concern themselves greatly with matters of signification and their relevance to poetry as (potentially) 'feminine' discourse and it is my belief that, beyond causal narrative, the meta-text of the sequence is organised around the implications of the actual poetic structuring adopted. Numerological symbolism, expressed in a concern over the structure of a complete sonnet *sequence*, is directly appropriate to a form - the sonnet - whose internal balance (or lack of it) relies upon the juxtaposition of defined internal units - octave and sestet. Professor Fowler has shown the possible structural metaphor implicit in the pyramidal formation of Shakespeare's sonnets, and made a detailed and revealing numerological study of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (86). Another critic, John Fuller, reads these structurally emblematic overviews as

... one way of imposing a meaningful
structure on a possibly open ended form. (87)

In *Monna Innominata*, one might argue, the structuring of the sequence, taken as metaphor, is managed in such a way as to *emphasise*, not redress, the open ended nature of the whole work's argument, emblematically embodying an ironic image of the notion of centrality/stability which is repeatedly assumed and then dismissed, at literal and symbolic levels, in the sequence. The eighth sonnet of *Monna*

Innominata taken as a whole - that dealing with the story of Esther - marks the moment of the volta in the Rossetti cycle and thus functions as an interpretative centre around which, and from the import of which the other pieces take their place in the debate. This geocentric patterning works by coupled inversions thus;

Sonnet:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	{	{	{	{	{	{	**	}	}	}	}	}	}	}
Sonnet:	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

In the terms of this geometrically metaphoric structuring, sonnets IV and V lie in the same relations to the central principle of the debate as sonnets X and XI and this proximal bearing is a guarantee of the register upon which the coupled sonnets figure to operate, their weight and import in the face of the totality of the argument. (There is no need to elaborate upon specific instances of this at present, its relevance will become apparent when I come to discuss the later sonnets in terms of those which have gone before.) The first sonnet of the series becomes the complimentary partner to the last, and all exhibit themselves as stemming from the centre of the text as a whole. But there are obviously other ordering energies at work within the sequence. The actual placing in sequence of the verses as we have them, actively reinforced by their specified enumeration, cannot help but suggest a progressive statement, read as a continuous narrative, which the subtextual workings of the poetry attempt to subvert. And the 'Sonnet Of Sonnets' directive dictates that within the text we recognise a separate octave and sestet, with the rise and fall in poetic energies that tradition has brought this structuring to entail. Hence, even where the

subtle but elaborate patterning of the sonnets into their seemingly loose ordering is concerned, one detects the awareness of conflicting modes of structuring which juxtapose one another in a perpetual exercise of 'deconstruction'. The legitimacy of one system is defined by its own terms and yet is deftly laid bare by a recontextualisation which allows it to be read on other premises. The pertinency of this general reading will become clear as a fuller interpretation of the whole methodology of *Monna Innominata* unfolds.

The fourth sonnet of *Monna Innominata* is rather different in tone from the third. The language is still direct and plain but the despondency is forgotten as the text prepares to make another attempt at ordering the disorder and expressing a woman's view of a world traditionally structured to her disadvantage. The anti-Petrarchan portrayal of a balance (as opposed to the mediaeval imbalance) of love-power between speaker and addressee which opens the sonnet is, appropriately, imaged in terms of the articulation of song, from which point the speaker proceeds to question notions of (in)equality and (dis)unity in love and in language.

I loved you first: but afterwards your love,
Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song
As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.
Which owes the other the most? My love was long,
And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
And loved me for what might or might not be -
Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.
For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
For one is both and both are one in love:
Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';
Both have the strength and both the length thereof,

Both of us, of the love which makes us one. (V, 1-14)

Taken on its own, this sonnet might be read as representing a lightly sarcastic historical analysis of woman's gradually relegated position - and the unfairness of that relegation - in the tradition of amatory literature. It begins with an abrupt assertion of female identity - 'I loved you first...' - before outlining woman's enforced passivity in love matters and the resultant male monopoly in areas of poetic expression, finally focusing attention towards language itself. The interest in the interaction of opposite, complementary elements of a system of integration indicates that this sonnet, like the third, will move around and towards a notion of unity and stability, of 'the love which makes us one.' The progressive displacement and reorganisation of energies here, might be seen as manoeuvring the text somewhat towards the negotiation and construction of a stable poetic subject. As noted before, the exposition of a radically feminine perspective necessarily involves a primary investigation of the female self and its constituent psychological make-up. One possibility, then, open to *Monna Innominata* would be the provision of a integral, stable poet-subject as symptomatic of the achievement of the ordering centre of which Derrida speaks, by which principle of intelligibility all other subsidiary elements of the proposed system may be deduced and thus comprehended. As is so often the case with the poetry of Christina Rossetti, the terms in which the balance is proposed, the actual language used, soon alert us to the sub-textual implications at work here;

I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
And loved me for what might or might not be... (IV, 6-7)

These lines are very significant and reveal the complexity behind what, superficially, may seem very straightforward use of language. The speaker 'loved' first and then 'guessed at' the loved one. The drive preceded (or was coincident with) the estimation of the qualitative nature of the oppositional party. Similarly 'you construed me' - the speaker was 'construed' (interpreted, analysed or CONSTRUCTED grammatically) in words, by the addressee of the poetry and was 'loved for what might or might not be'. There is, then, a definite move towards giving an assessment, a definition even, of the nature of the poetic subject, constructed by language, and yet, 'for what might or might not be', the admission of the uncontainability and unpredictability, the uncertainty of identity is still a prominent feature of the text. The related interest in the instability of pronouns in the face of a desired order is then pursued, as the speaker once more turns away from empirical evidence;

Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.
For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
For one is both and both are one in love:
(IV, 8-11)

This provides another direct example of the poetry's very forward-looking concern with language itself, openly addressing the signifiers constituting its own mode of discourse. Beyond the rejected world of 'weights and measures', the power of 'love' - here a secular, very human

'love' - seems to have the potential to provide a sure principle of intelligibility which, by becoming a guarantee of meaning over and above the fickleness of unstable pronominal signification, injects certitude into the philosophy of the text at this point. The 'faith that maketh rich', spoken of previously in terms of the unworkable dream ideal of harmony and stability, the desire for belief in an ordering concept to make smooth the chaos of unsure identities, has now evolved into the seemingly more appropriate centre, 'Rich love'. In knowing 'nought of 'thine that is not mine'', this ideal may dissolve the uncertain referential potential of signifiers to leave a harmoniously functioning system where balanced elements have their own sure identity and place within that system, allowing the construction of a stable poetic subject;

Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
Both of us, of the love that makes us one.

(IV, 13-14)

The epigram from Petrarch which precedes the fifth sonnet, translated by W.M. Rossetti as 'Love led me into such joyous hope' (*Works*, p. 462), functions in this recontextualised position to reflect and reinforce the 'joyous' tone of the poetry at this point. In direct juxtaposition is Dante's ominous reminder that all elements of a centred system must submit to the government of the ordering principle;

Love, who exempts no loved one from loving.

(*Ibid*)

The dichotomy evident here is thematically echoed in the sonnet itself - joy at spiritual certitude tempered with despair at earthly division - as the 'love' in question is directed towards God for divine sanction. The octave opens with an affirmation of the sense of unity described in the previous verse. The poetic subject is momentarily stable, embracing

this unity as a means of reinforcing the internalised conception of the poetic impulse;

O my heart's heart, and you who are to me
More than myself myself...

(V, 1-2)

This proximal fusion of signifiers - 'heart's heart... myself myself' - with the consequent semantic concentration effected, infuses a stabilising effect into the language structure which is appropriate to the idea that a competent discourse has been established in which to frame the remaining verses. But then, the very moment we have been led to feel comfortable with the terms of one discourse, a fierce intrusion upon the flow of the text may be perceived. As the secular passion is offered up for divine sanction (essentially a request for absolute stability, for 'perfection' of the issue) a new and very different language register is suddenly introduced;

...God be with you,
Keep you in strong obedience leal and true
To Him whose noble service setteth free;

(V, 2-4)

This liturgical pronouncement is bred of orthodox Christian Biblical discourse and heralds the way for the complete embrace of piety the speaker (and Rossetti) is eventually to perform. This language type had been alluded to before (notably at the end of Sonnet III) but was always recontextualised, the remanagement of adopted registers being a prominent feature of *Monna Innominata*, to promote the idea of a fledgling system of meaning assimilating influence from other established language registers, in consequence reworking and extending

the potential semantic range of the borrowed input. The usage of Dantean and Petrarchan motifs to head poems written six centuries later is a device with similar implications with regard to the pluralistic generation of meaning. The entrance of 'God' and His attendant system of philosophy into proceedings at the opening of this fifth sonnet represents an intrusion into the argument of the cycle up to that point. It is an entrance brought about by the speaker's stringent desire for utmost stability but, in the terms set out thus far by the poem, it represents an intrusion, and not a stabilising factor in the argument nonetheless. As soon as a harmonious, centred system appeared to have been discovered (as at the close of Sonnet IV) a radically new principle of intelligibility is cast into the face of this framework. 'God' is introduced as an oppositional centre, an orthodox principle as used in the Dantean text, within and yet outside the system, and here the centrality of this organising factor is immediately stressed in its ability to keep the signifiatory nominers (specifically 'you') 'in strong obedience leal and true'. Additionally, the upper case initialling in 'Him...He...' traditionally demands that the whole discourse proffered from the central 'God' principle be seen as a reflection of divine power as governing that whole system. Keeping all the subsidiary elements of the system 'leal and true' in a 'service' which paradoxically liberates, the Christian deity stands at the head of a mode of discourse heavily at odds with the terms of the philosophy of earthly union argued and resolved in the previous sonnet. In desiring to

Give you all good we see or can forsee,
Make your joys many and your sorrows few,
Bless you in what you hear and what you do
Yea, perfect you as He would have you be...

(V, 5-8)

the divine meta-presence demands, and is allowed (since His influence extends beyond that which 'we see or can foresee') overwhelming authority over the condition of the ministrant elements of the network at the head of which 'He' is placed. Structurally, this whole sonnet collects as a unit around the word 'He' which is the central word of the central couplet (in line 8) of the poem, emblematically but also semantically a pivotal point since it establishes the volta of the sonnet which ends the octave. This geometrically central positioning of the word 'He' is a direct indication of the centrality the sign demands over the discourse fashioned thereby. After this bold intrusion of one self-perpetuating doctrine upon what had just been proffered as a balanced frame of discourse, the speaker, now once more deconstructed (or possibly unconstructed) by the language of the text as a whole, can only sardonically interject,

So much for you; but what for me, dear friend?
(V, 9)

This blunt, somewhat pathetic interrogation emphasises the renewed desperation of the speaker in the face of sudden collapse of the theory of identity and signification that the early verses of *Monna Innominata* had deliberately made it their business to construct. The speaker's forthright question also neatly and directly contradicts the terms of the unity stemming from the system proposed in Sonnet IV;

With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,

For one is both and both are one in love...

(IV, 10-11)

The promotion of 'the love that makes us one' as a central ordering principle to give stability to the relationship between speaker and addressee outlined in the cycle thus far - encouraging the linguistic stability which made relevant the 'heart's heart' and 'myself myself' constructions which opened the fifth sonnet - would render wholly irrelevant a question such as 'So much for you; but what for me, dear friend?' proposed some seven lines later. The point to be taken from this provocative shifting from register to register, from certitude back to irresolution, is that a self contained system with its own established governing principle (say, the 'faith' in secular 'love') stands adequately as a law unto itself - as a grand tautological exercise, such as that made manifest in the poetics of Dante. However, if the finely balanced constituent elements of this system are allowed to be recontextualised around a new, albeit equally feasible ordering principle, here the orthodox Christian deity, they take upon themselves a whole new measure of signification and thus can no longer be relied upon for their former stability and referential certainty. Given knowledge of this fall from certainty which comes with even the most marginal recontextualisation, it is hardly surprising that Sonnet V more or less peters out in a despairing, unquestioning cliché of woman's status and purpose (coloured also by the belief that the Biblical and Victorian amatory ideology recognised at this point is one which fails adequately to appreciate the desires of 'woman ... made for man');

So much for you; but what for me, dear friend?

To love you without stint and all I can,
Today, to-morrow, world without an end;
To love you much and yet to love you more,
As Jordan at his flood sweeps either shore;
Since woman is the helpmeet made for man.

(V, 9-14)

To her position of ardent investigation into the possibility of a radically 'feminine' discourse, the female speaker must now reconcile the submissiveness demanded with the admission that 'woman is the helpmeet made for man'. The reconciliation is an impossible one. The effect, in context, of this bland assertion of Biblical dogma is painfully ironic - an irony which is deliberately an uncomfortable disruption of expectation, as the sentiments of the text become increasingly at odds with the register explored in the earlier sonnets. This citation of pious dogma in a purportedly confident manner as the conclusion to a fervent inner debate which precludes such complacent summary is characteristic of Rossetti's earlier devotional lyrics, and is discussed in detail in the following chapter. The speaker *wants* to believe the Biblical doctrine, but doubt will out. At this point, *Monna Innominata* begins to inhabit that state, defined with regard to Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality' by F. W. Bateson, where

the contradiction between what
the [poem] is meant to say and what it actually
says is acute... the tone of voice in which
the claim is advanced at once throws doubt upon
its validity. Can what is so clearly felt
to be only a second best be considered a success
at all?

(86)

'My heart's a coward though my words are brave' (VII, 9), the speaker of the sonnets gravely admits. Rossetti's sonnet cycle begins to live a lie; its attempts at the justification of divine writ are conducted in a manner which shouts 'Compromise!' when it wishes quietly to disavow the struggle that has gone before. Preparing the way for her late, dogmatically pious works, Rossetti attempts vainly to turn the failure of her quest for stability into an announcement of religious conviction - a sad strategy we will find prevalent in her exegetical tracts when we examine them shortly.

Yet, taken as a whole work, *Monna Innominata* still maintains a compelling tension due to the debate with itself seen in action already thus far, which continues by degrees as the cycle continues. The poem can never wholly assume the dimension of religious propaganda because the speaker can never wholly escape from the secular, intellectual tension erected in the early sonnets of the sequence. But the sense of two sets of values working together, desired at this mid-section of the work, is not to be. Sonnet X, where the tone has become one of resignation and 'tired hope' and yet the lyric 'still finds breath to pray and sing', again argues faith in 'love ahead of all' as a central principle of intelligibility, concluding,

...and life reborn annuls
Loss and decay and death, and all is love.
(X, 13-14)

But, again, the sentiments here are suspect - the lulling repetition of 'and...' suggests a rhetoric disguising lack of substance. This over-

emphatically proffered attempt at closure and certitude, ultimately positioned in the sonnet as was the unifying notion of 'the love which makes us one' in Sonnet IV, again stems from the interaction of two opposing absolutes (here, 'life' and 'death') and is gradually subjected to the test of recontextualisation witnessed earlier in the sequence. Notions of unity are cast into the balance in terms which recall the abruptness of the 'So much for you; but what for me, dear friend?' charge of the fifth sonnet;

Many in aftertimes will say of you
'He loved her' - while of me what will they say?
(XI, 1-2)

This potentially disruptive tone is temporarily averted by the end of the verse by the re-assertion of 'love' as an all consuming absolute, indeed, by an insistence finally that this 'love' is a system in itself ('life') and not simply a sign of such ('breath', a 'sign' of 'life'). This assurance attempts to bring a settled sense of harmony to the next sonnet, again expressed in language very similar to that of Sonnet V;

O my heart's heart, and you who are to me
More than myself myself... (V, 1-2)

...the heart is yours that was mine own,
Your pleasure is my pleasure, right my right,
Your honourable freedom makes me free,
And you companioned I am not alone. (XII, 11-14)

But this newfound certitude is immediately redirected at a different set of premises with the (re-)introduction of the Christian deity, named as the 'Primal Love' *Works*, p. 463) in the Dantean epigram to the piece,

marking the assertion of 'God' again as an absolute centre of a system of generation of meaning in the face of which the unity newly proffered by the speaker no longer holds the same order of signification.

If I could trust mine own self with your fate,
Shall I not rather trust it in God's hand?

(XIII, 1-2)

It is notable, in a text so deeply concerned with matters of language and literariness, that the return of 'God' as image of the absolute principle of intelligibility should itself be marked by an image accountable to terms of writing, 'in God's hand', as the text proposes to rewrite its own parameters. The poetry once more pulls apart its own argument, in the process analysing the signifying potential of discourse types and showing that recontextualisation necessarily involves a re-allocation of significance. But there is a negation involved here. The speaker of *Monna Innominata*, one feels, turns to God *in lieu* of the affirmation sought thus far as much as for commendation of that faith. Self-assertion gives way to adoption of the socially approved stance of religious conviction as the sequence anticipates the explicit, conventionally pious tone of Rossetti's later poetry. The embrace of divine ordinance is not a convincing one, and remains unconvincing throughout the work.

The sixth sonnet of the sequence continues the lapse into stereotypical Biblical symbolism.

Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke -
I love, as you would have me, God the most;

Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost,
Nor with Lot's wife cast back a faithless look,
Unready to forgo what I forsook... (VI, 1-5)

The plaintive and soothing tones of this sonnet's opening line superficially mark a return to optimism, or at least a turning away from resignation and despair, on the part of the speaker. And yet the words ring hollow. In the terms of the meta-fiction we have observed to be operating in the text, the line is still addressed, on one level of meaning, inwardly. In this manner, the opening of this verse heralds a self-reflective consolidation, another new beginning. The balancing of syntactic structures which runs through the argument of this sonnet reflects the desire, born of the confusion of the preceding verse, to achieve some kind of synthesis of the two systems of intelligibility - that founded upon earthly values, and that based on Christian theological principles - alluded to in the poetry thus far. Incompatible when seen as opposites simply cast together, such a reading demands that one centre assume absolute authority at the expense of the other: this kind of fusion, attempting a conjunction by means of the overlap in the boundaries of the two discourse types, is a potentially reductive step;

I love, as you would have me, God the most;
Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost.
(VI, 2-3)

The worldly *versus* spiritual dilemma, in terms of the surface narrative of these lines, is one which Christina Rossetti knew well from her own experience, with the proposals of marriage from Collinson and Cayley. In

the poetic text, the irreconcilability of the two modes of philosophy, secular passion and holy devotion, must move towards some manner of successful integration in order that the flow of the sequence continue. One detects in this sonnet a rather air where the compatability of the two modes of discourse - the one governed by secular desire and the other by the divine omnipresence - is concerned. the speaker seems to think that by mechanically repeating her devotion, 'Trust me... I love... God... I love my God... I love Him more', she will somehow convince herself (and the reader) that it allows no contradictions. The dilemma of the speaker here is cast in two images lifted from Biblical tradition, the tale of 'Lot's wife' and the image of Christ the shepherd, and this in represents another attempt at integrating the new devotional discourse into the terms of the poetic text as a whole. Like the lovers' relationship at literal level, the desire for 'meeting' of sign and referent is now translated into a new context, a move towards manageable synthesis of the two systems at work here, with their given differing centres of intelligibility. A revolutionary ordering principle must be found which can govern the totality of the fully integrated structure, its influence pervading that totality to engender stability in the whole synthesised system of discourse and thus to the pattern of signification generated thereby. The earthly and the heavenly, the letter and the spirit, must correlate.

I love Him more, so let me love you too;
Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
I cannot love you if I love not Him,
I cannot love Him if I love not you. (VI, 11-14)

The plainly expressed conclusion reached here confirms the strain felt by the speaker over the disruptive influence the quest for a singular centre of meaning is occasioning to the *Monna Innominata* thus far. Turning on a deliberate syntactic and semantic balance, the desire for a mode of speaking which will encompass yet allow expression to each of the two separate doctrines becomes a major energy within the text; it is a positive energy that the speaker does not seek to escape from, as confirmed in the terms of the Petrarchan epigram;

I do not choose that Love should release
me from such a tie. (Works, p. 462)

Subjected to this assertive energy, the 'quality of the love' outlined in the text of *Monna Innominata* may thus be heightened, since the assimilation of the two modes of thought will doubly reinforce the depth of import of the new unity constructed. The simple syntactic and rhythmic balance of the sonnet's closing couplet harmoniously frames the sentiments, (ironically couched in terms of negativity born of the chaos from which order proceeds), which represent the speaker's self-justifying enactment of the desired interaction. 'Him' and 'you' are quite literally - and lexically - absolutely balanced.

I cannot love you if I love not Him,
I cannot love Him if I love not you.
(VI, 13-14)

The opening couplet of Sonnet VII attempts, again self-consciously, to echo the staged mood of balance, harmony and stability which ended the

previous piece. The 'faith that maketh rich who take or give' sought fruitlessly from the extemporal but unsatisfying world of 'happy dreams', wherein the desire to achieve a stable ordering principle was first exercised, is envisioned here in the more manageable principle of intelligibility that is spiritual 'love'. As in the 1849 lyric 'An End' *Works*, p. 292), this considered and heightened form of love is here proffered as an absolute idea, to be read in terms of absolutes, 'strong as death'. At a subtextual level the achieved balance also finds illustration;

'Love me, for I love you' - and answer me,
'Love me, for I love you' - so shall we stand...
(VII, 1-2)

When the linguistic proposition is received and echoed directly in form as an 'answer' - an exercise which, ironically, relies upon the direct interchangeability, and thus the referential unreliability of pronouns - then shall speaker and addressee, thus symbolically in terms of this text signifier and signified, (we have no reference outwith the speaker's own terms and conception of the world and the word)

...stand
As happy equals in the flowering land
Of love, that knows not a dividing sea.
(VII, 2-4)

Firm foundation 'on rock and not on sand' is established when the 'dividing sea', the gap in interpretative potential, the area between sign and referent, is no more. But this 'song' of *Monna Innominata* as early as

the first sonnet was imaged as emblematic, as itself a sign denoting the gap between letter and spirit. Here we receive the first indication of the dilemma which, given the premises set forth so far, will inevitably occupy *Monna Innominata* as it attempts to reach a conclusion, a conclusion which it has warned itself against reaching by its own repeated illustration of the perils of attempting any form of closure or immutability. The 'song' seeks, on one important level, to bridge the gap between sign and signifier, to achieve a principle of intelligibility which is radical in that it stands aloof from those played out in the phallogocentric tradition of poetry Christina Rossetti sought to oppose and subvert, ignoring the presuppositions thereby entailed and thus constructing a new mode of writing capable of addressing the issue of female identity on neutral, unloaded terms. The song, then, attempts a return to innocence, the desire (akin to that symbolically fantasised in *Goblin Market*) for a unified state on all levels. It becomes the emblem, in writing, of the 'dividing sea' between sign and referent which allows the possibility of the misreading of signifiers, as we saw in the chain of signification established in Sonnet I, and as the song plays out its own motives it seeks to resolve the gap that has come to exist between letter and spirit. But since the 'song' is an emblem of the 'gap' it seeks on one level to abolish, then it is clear that it is unretrievably at odds with its own envisioned terms and demands; it is as if the 'song' gives itself a deathwish, a wish that must be fulfilled if a return to innocence is symbolically to be achieved. The ultimate deconstruction performed by *Monna Innominata* is of itself as a text tested under its own terms; it finds itself to be a contradiction and, as

the volta of the sequence is approached, this recognition begins to become apparent.

This recognition underlies Sonnet VII, and it is a recognition triggered by the progression of the argument of the sequence up to this point reflected in the casting of images. Initially, there was no reconciliation of the devotional iconography and the secular situation, one was merely an intrusion upon the terms of the other. Latterly, the speaker's dilemma became translated into and imaged in terms of authoritarian Old Testament imagery (the 'Lot's wife' image in Sonnet VI, etc.). Now the desired stability stemming from the achievement of a synthesis of discourses is itself pictured in orthodox Christian imagery, in a scene from the Gospels of *Matthew* (vii, 24-27) and *Luke* (vi, 48);

Love builds the house on rock and not on sand,
Love laughs what while the winds rave desperately...
(VII, 5-6)

The resolution of what appeared earlier to be irreconcilable modes of address could ideally engender stability in the form of equality, where speaker and addressee become 'happy equals', and from this harmonious state stems great abundance (the Dantean epigram translates as 'Here always Spring and every fruit') imaged in elysian terms of

...the flowering land
Of love, that knows not a dividing sea.
(VII, 3-4)

However, this consciously wrought, conventionally imposed rejection of division has other, less welcome implications. In Sonnet I of *Monna Innominata* this 'song', the poetic text itself, was set up symbolically as interlocutor between signifier and signified, and the lack of concordance between signs and referents was reflected by the disharmonious state of the speaker's utterances, striving ever towards a condition of unity and stability, in the early verses of the cycle. Now, though the exercise of repeated recontextualisation has taught the speaker that no one dogmatically proffered ordering principle is enough, conventional pious faith is offered as a panacea to bridge the 'dividing sea' between letter and spirit. But this release from struggle condemns the very song of the speaker to 'death'. Now an emblem of that thing which it sought to negate (ideology unchallenged), the 'song' itself has sentenced itself to redundancy. It has, in a literal sense, deconstructed its own methodology, verifying that previously cited condition upholding Rossetti's finest work;

... all that was but showed what all was not,
But gave clear proof of what might never be;
Making more destitute my poverty,
And yet more blank my lot... (*Works*, p. 65)

This painful anxiety, that stability by definition argues the possibility of instability, persistently informs the text of *Monna Innominata*. This sense of strain comes to a head in sonnet VII with two ambiguously rhetorical questions 'And who hath...?' followed by a frustrated admission;

My heart's a coward though my words are brave -

We meet so seldom, yet we surely part
So often; there's a problem for your art!
(VII, 9-11)

A poignant acknowledgement of compromise, this statement might be taken as a crystallisation of the interests at work in the whole *Monna Innominata* cycle. The speaker's 'heart' and 'words', the spirit and the letter 'meet so seldom, yet...part / So often' - a plain acknowledgement of the danger of disregarding the possibility of instability once a manner of stability has been achieved in a discourse. This also forms an admittance that the text needs the 'dividing sea' in order to continue; once the poetic text and its discourse 'knows not a dividing sea' then its *raison d'être*, made clear right from the outset, is removed. That signs and referents 'surely part/So often' is indeed 'a problem for your art' for it is the problem that this art strives to resolve only to find that closure of the 'dividing' gap in signification procedure ultimately means closure to the poetic text, the removal of forward-reaching energies. In the same way, the adoption of the unswervingly orthodox Christian perspective removes from Rossetti's writing those vital, analytic energies which we have seen as integral to the enduring appeal and effect of her best work.

Approaching the central point of the sequence, a summary of the motives of the cycle is attempted in the light of recent developments. Turning for guidance to a self contained literary text (the *Bible*, 'his Book') which stands as a doctrine with its own clear codes of signification, the speaker is content, in a way that would previously have been impossible, with their tensionless, unproblematic and complacent absolutes;

Still I find comfort in his Book who saith,
Though jealousy be cruel as the grave,
And death be strong, yet love is strong as death.
(VII, 12-14)

Progressively, 'comfort' is sought unquestioningly from the philosophy represented by 'his Book', and yet, seeds of doubt, or regret at having made this compromise, remain. Sonnet VIII, central by the geocentric structuring mentioned earlier and also heralding the volta of the sequence, re-narrates and recontextualises the Biblical story of Esther. It stands as a dramatic interlude at the heart of a text with little drama elsewhere and is to be read as a fable, illustrative of the interests of *Monna Innominata* as a complete text. It is a wonderfully compact yet evocative poem, and worth quoting in full here.

'I, if I perish' - Esther spake:
And bride of life or death she made her fair
In all the lustre of her perfumed hair
And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.
She put on pomp of loveliness, to take
Her husband through his eyes at unaware;
She spread abroad her beauty for a snare,
Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.
She trapped him with one mesh of silken hair,
She vanquished him by wisdom of her wit,
And built her people's house that it should stand: -
If I might take my life so in my hand,
And for my love to Love put up my prayer,
And for love's sake by Love be granted it!
(VIII, 1-14)

The story of Esther, as told in Christina Rossetti's words, is a woman's story. It is the story of a woman understanding and coming to terms with a male viewpoint in a world totally ordered by masculine principles, and, by means of feminine 'wit', the tale of woman attempting

to manipulate the male codes to her advantage, thereby re-shaping existence to her own ends and desires. In so much, Esther is trying to rewrite tradition and subvert received ideology in a manner akin to that attempted by Christina Rossetti's sonnet cycle. But like the speaker of *Monna Innominata*, Esther can only resolve her quest in compromise - to achieve her desired goal, Esther too must adopt an ultimately conventional role, the role of temptress and Eve figure. It is notable that Esther is described as 'Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake', in a quite deliberate, recontextualised echo of Christ's ambiguous instructions to his apostles in *Matthew* 10, xvi-xvii;

15. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the
midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents,
and harmless as doves.

16. But beware of men...

Christ's words image the notion of innocence going abroad amongst those who seek, and have sought to usurp it, 'as sheep in the midst of wolves'; to overcome, it is implied, it may be necessary to be opposites, to accept a contradiction, 'serpents, and... doves', rather than to attempt a reconciliation. Esther is forced into a similar compromise, so far as Rossetti reads her plight, becoming part-courtesan, part-feminist in attempting to control her own destiny and resurrect gender-equality. The *Old Testament* Book of *Esther* is only ten chapters in length, and the actual 'deception', or rather the manipulation of the desires of King Ahasuerus, a discussion of which forms the main preoccupation of the Rossetti sonnet, is described briefly in only three verses;

1. Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.
 2. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.
 3. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.
- (Esther 5, 1-iii)

It can be seen from this that Rossetti's retelling of Esther's experience uses considerable poetic license and, moreover, evinces a relocation of interest in the parable. The Biblical text places the authority, the ultimate control over the proceedings, in the hands of the king, with Esther very much submitted (and *submissive*) to the monarch's will. Notably, *Monna Innominata* shifts the power balance so that Esther becomes the would-be director of the drama. In Rossetti's eleven line version Esther is the governing subject of every verb as the passivity of the Bible's 'she obtained favour' is redrawn by Rossetti's active constructions 'She trapped him ... She vanquished him'. Emphasis is placed wholly upon the manner in which the woman manages to manipulate the motivations of the male. Within a male-dominated sphere, Esther used her feminine intuitiveness - the 'wisdom of her wit' - to control by subversion what she deduces to be predictable codes of masculine conduct. And how is this subversion brought about? Purely by Esther's understanding of signs and how they will be (mis)read 'through his eyes' by the male interpreter. Refusing to submit to the governing influence of any one absolute - she is 'bride of life or death' - Esther 'put[s] on

pomp of loveliness' as a 'snare' - she places to her advantage neutral signifiers which she knows Ahasuerus will read as loaded signals in order to provoke a response which, through experience of a phallogocentric logos, Esther can accurately predict. But the triumph is a precarious one. In articulating an active identity, Esther has simultaneously inhabited the traditional image of female deviousness. Her victory, like that experienced by the speaker of *Monna Innominata*, is ambiguously established and has the hollow ring of compromise about it. The tale is introduced by that which *Monna Innominata* has sought to promote in its entirety - female utterance as Esther voices her own power over her own fate. Her words are of supreme importance;

'I, if I perish, perish' - Esther spake...

(VIII, 1)

Esther's speech is tautological. The gap, literally, between the subject and predicate, 'I.....perish', is taken up with a direct reinforcement of the import of the main clause. The intermediate 'dividing' clause merely serves to add absolute certainty to the signification of the main force of the utterance. And yet, on the same level of reading, this makes the linking clause nothing more than a redundant item, by consummately closing the gap of (mis)interpretation it renders itself useless as a semantic conveyance. This device works as a brilliant microcosmic representation of the dilemma which, as we have seen, the poetics of the whole text of *Monna Innominata* revolve around. Esther's story continues;

...she made her fair
In all the lustre of her perfumed hair
And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.

She put on pomp of loveliness, to take
Her husband through his eyes at unaware;
She spread abroad her beauty for a snare,
Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.

(VIII, 2-8)

It is a fable of the coming to terms with outward signs, a description of the deliberate management of signifiers around a centre that is woman, the 'feminine' principle, and which must yet acknowledge the influence of other absolutes, 'life' and 'death', and the masculine orientated society into which the female registering will be born. Esther knows that man will read and interpret the signals she will 'spread abroad' in a manner established by a tradition of masculinity. Thus to subvert this tradition, as she does, she must herself understand its premises and acknowledge its position as an inscribed structure. Like the Rossetti text, Esther is adept at this intellectual juggling but, again like Rossetti's poetry, she must ultimately employ a conventional stance. By evading one objectionable ideological pose, Esther is seen to inhabit an equally insidious (considering her goal) position - desiring to usurp male authority, she turns herself into the archetypal seductress 'subtle as a snake'. By these means, Esther is victorious and, in an image directly recalling the cycle's own yearning for stability in the previous sonnet, builds 'her people's house that it should stand'. Using the 'in...hand' image negotiable in terms of the writing process, the speaker confesses,

If I might take my life so in my hand,
And for my love to Love put up my prayer,
And for love's sake by Love be granted it!

(VIII, 12-14)

This 'prayer' forms (literally) the central energy behind *Monna Innominata*. From a woman's perspective, Christina Rossetti's sonnet cycle demonstrates the urge to readdress the phallogcentrically biased balance of power as expressed in the traditional love lyric, written by men according to values constructed by men. Like Esther, Rossetti is engaged in an attempt to reclaim symbols and signifiers from the patriarchal ideology-laden realm they have occupied for so long, making them imaginatively bereft of meaning where the construction of a realistically feminine viewpoint is concerned. Esther's quest is shown to be partially successful, a compromise: Rossetti's, thus far, is of the same order. The whole strategy of the octave of sonnets of *Monna Innominata* stands to prove this plaintive wish an untenable desire, the yearning to establish an uncontroversial centre of intelligibility (here 'Love') about which to build a stable mode of truly 'feminine' discourse. Caught in the progressive re-evaluation of its own premises, *Monna Innominata* continually abandons its speaker 'not hopeless quite nor faithless quite,/Because not loveless' (IX) and yet perpetually 'turning to the wall' (IX) of language which refuses to be held in fixed signification around a workable centre. The continual procedures of recontextualisation and deconstruction performed by the text upon its own arguments always focus attention onto language in its search for a 'feminine' poetical perspective, only to illustrate that it is language itself that ultimately denies the possibility of the stability and unity towards which the speaker (in language and, thus, in life) continually strives. Conventional piety offers that stability.

The recontextualised story of Esther, then, in the terms of the whole octave of *Monna Innominata* as interpreted above, stands as an (ironic) ideal - a vision of

... all that was, and all
That might have been and now can never be ... (IX, 1-2)

In Esther's stylised sphere, woman may usurp the male-ordered social and semantic codes and reorder signifiers to her own ends, never minding that, by doing so, she betrays her sex in other ways, inhabiting another male-revered stereotype and corrupting the purity of beauty with a consciously provocative sexuality. In Christina Rossetti's world, such an act is socially impossible and yet, symbolically, her poetry has performed it: however they may subvert the terms of the patriarchal tradition, the poetics of *Monna Innominata* are still irreparably the product of that tradition's polarised values. The whole Rossetti cycle itself is, in an important way, a recontextualisation of tradition - in its openly intertextual nature it relies for effect upon the reader's knowledge of the codes and ideological implications of the literary and social forms (mediaeval, Dantean, Petrarchan and Victorian) it both echoes and repudiates. Consequently, the last six sonnets of *Monna Innominata* again relocate the focus of the work where the search for a feminine subjectivity is concerned and bring the series around to a conception not of how things 'might have been and now can never be', but of how things are. Progressively embracing God's will, the tone of the macro-sestet of the cycle is not one of optimism, but one of resignation. The first eight sonnets have convinced the speaker of the

untenability of a stable perspective, except in terms of an conventionally pious, ideal vision, and now the sestet seeks to salvage some kind of intelligence from the resulting sense of compromise.

Thinking of you, and all that was, and all
That might have been and now can never be,
I feel your honoured excellence, and see
Myself unworthy of the happier call:
For woe is me who walk so apt to fall,
So apt to shrink afraid, so apt to flee,
Apt to lie down and die (ah woe is me!)
Faithless and hopeless; turning to the wall.
And yet not hopeless quite nor faithless quite,
Because not loveless... (IX, 1-10)

The shift in tone at the volta of this sonnet is crucial. The speaker 'so apt to fall' is the eternal Eve, on the one hand, admitting defeat here, 'hopeless, turning to the wall' of battle lost which has repeatedly stood in the way of the cycle's progress towards purity of expression. Yet this acceptance of mutability, 'Apt to lie down and die', brings with it the ultimate possibility of salvation in the afterlife 'out of view', thus the potential for eternal harmony. With the solemn resignation to the impossibility of earthly fulfilment comes the symbolic acceptance by the speaker that the hitherto fruitless quest for a stable principle of meaning - for an ultimate absolute - must be relinquished. The speaker's 'song' has by now generated firstly a transcendent vision (or *version*) of unity with respect to the lovers' relationship and, secondly - in the octave of sonnets culminating in the re-signified Esther myth - an ironic, fantasy portrait of a female-ordered, compromised existence. The promotion of 'God' in the first eight sonnets, opposing the secular conjunction simultaneously desired, has functioned in a disruptively

ambivalent fashion; the divine centre has presented to the speaker a guarantee of transcendent stability but also a barrier to the text's achievement of linguistic certainty. Now Rossetti prepares utterly to subsume her identity in the face of devotional ordination. The speaker 'yet not hopeless', attempting not just a spiritual salvation but also a salvation of *meaning*, emphasises this new recognition in the tenth sonnet.

Time flies, hope flags, life plies a wearied wing;
Death following hard on life gains ground apace;
Faith runs with each and rears an eager face,
Outruns the rest, makes light of everything,
Spurns earth, and still finds breath to pray and sing...
(X, 1-5)

Armed with the knowledge afforded to her by the outcome of *Monna Innominata's* octave, the speaker shows herself here coming to terms with the irresolution experienced earlier. There is a marked shift of emphasis here from absolutes - 'Time... hope... life... Death...' - now proven to be mutable (and thus imaged in terms of fatigue) towards an all encompassing relativity in the higher 'Faith' that 'runs with each' and, thus, 'makes light' of the reductive struggle towards the establishment of one absolute above the other.

... when love folds his wings above
Tired hope, and less we feel his conscious pulse,
Let us go fall asleep, dear friend, in peace:
A little while, and age and sorrow cease;
A little while, and life reborn annuls
Loss and decay and death, and all is love. (X, 9-16)

This embracing of divine 'love' (portrayed in conventional and sentimental form), and the consequent rejection of any oppositional, secular passions, offers the one remaining possibility of 'life reborn' for the speaker and 'breath to pray and sing' for the sonnet cycle. And yet, in its affirmation of earthly mutability, the divine 'life reborn' heralds the (positive) acceptance of submission to 'silence' on the speaker's part. Moving towards the sudden and absolute submission of the devotional work of her final years, Rossetti has the speaker attempt to rationalise the newly embraced divine centre in terms of the intellectual debate conducted earlier. The 'conscious pulse' must be renounced, and, eschewing the struggle for stability on earth (and thereby rejecting the literary tradition which advocates that such stability be sought after), the speaker will gladly 'fall asleep ... in peace'. Having spent half of her poetic career evading the snares of tradition, Rossetti finally settles on the convention that says that all is resolved in Heaven, if only we have 'Faith' and refrain from questioning it. The prospect of divine salvation, for so long a source of tension and inner debate in Christina Rossetti's writing is now looked upon as a self-justifying certitude. As the language of the first eight sonnets progressed from one register attempting to articulate a secular passion to one steeped in devotional allusion, so now the sestet of sonnets proceeds to offer its resolve towards an omnipotent deity for the sanctioning of the speaker's re-allocated desire. Thus the earlier vision of earthly union is surrendered by measures in sonnets XI to XIII, thereby marking a thorough rejection of the previously interrogated ideology of male sonneteers who strive to construct such a secular conjunction. The speaker deferredly retains the 'nobler' vision of union and stability in

the afterlife 'out of view' - a vision which, ironically, previously was introduced as harbinger to the consummation of secular unity, only to become the precluder of that stability.

Sonnet XI - in a manner initially echoing but finally opposing the import of its geometric counterpart, sonnet IV, witnesses the speaker renouncing (the first of a series of renunciations in the service of divine sanction) the premises of the masculine lyric tradition whose ideology the whole cycle has interrupted and found to be duplicitous towards woman.

Many in aftertimes will say of you
'He loved her' - while of me what will they say?
Not that I loved you more than just in play,
For fashion's sake as idle women do.
Even let them prate; who know not what we knew
Of love and parting in exceeding pain,
Of parting hopeless here to meet again,
Hopeless on earth, and heaven is out of view.
(XI, 1-8)

The speaker's avowed ideal in *Monna Innominata* - to purify the lyric mode to a degree where the expression of an active female identity in language was a possibility - has failed by reason of the irreparable nature of the culture of the love poem, so long contaminated by earthly, patriarchal values. Were equality within the lyric attainable through the relocation of ideological bias, the shift in accepted significatory patterns attempted by the language of the early verses of the cycle, the poem would still operate within the parameters of the tradition it reinvents, (as Esther, to overcome, had to *become* seductress) and would thus be misread as writing 'just in play' and 'for fashion's sake'. An

implicit reference back to the prefatory indictment of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the 'happy' poetess representative of 'idle women' with no knowledge of 'parting in exceeding pain', deftly contemporises the historical critique. Countering the comparatively naive argument of sonnet IV, that 'Both [participants] have the strength' to demonstrate the condition of love, the sestet of sonnet XI acknowledges that, at the symbolic 'Judgement', it is the male version of events which will satisfy the (male-determined) conditions of poetic expression. Men have made the rules of the love game, ensuring that the rules deny the possibility of non-male advancement (unless, like Barrett Browning, they surrogately adopt the male position or, like Esther, they inhabit the role of seductress and satisfy another male expectation). As it stands, then, this literary tradition cannot be made innocent of ideology from within - 'Hopeless on earth', that quest must, then, be renounced before the higher, purer possibility of love's holy sanction in 'heaven ... out of view'. Retiring wearily from the phallocentricity of the literary canon, as written and as read, Sonnet XII furthers the withdrawal from the profane artistic arena by disavowing singular attachment to the lover on earth himself, thus refusing to participate in the specified terms of the love relationship prescribed by the lyric mode.

If there be any one can take my place
And make you happy whom I grieve to grieve,
Think not that I can grudge it, but believe
I do commend you that nobler grace,
That readier wit than mine, that sweeter face... (XII, 1-4)

The speaker's simply expressed disavowal of the profane principles of courtship here is specifically anti-Petrarchan and generally directed

against the male-formed, secular platitudes of the courtly love poem. Renouncing the loved one's affection on earth, the speaker further removes herself from the values of the traditional love poem by allowing her lover the freedom to form attachments with whatsoever paramour he may choose. By revealing the transferable nature of the supposedly singular, heartfelt emotions expressed through the tormented outpourings of the conventional phallogentric love lyric, Rossetti's speaker exposes the duplicity of that tradition. Her own seeming altruism serves to disassociate the speaker firstly from the lover's undivided attention and secondly from the type of poetry that lover would write, all in the service of a purer, unpolluted form of 'love' which transcends the earthly love games played by male poets, a better 'freedom' awaiting in the afterlife.

For if I did not love you, it might be
That I should grudge you some one dear delight;
But since the heart is yours that was mine own,
Your pleasure is my pleasure, right my right,
Your honourable freedom makes me free,
And you companioned I am not alone. (XII, 9-14)

The 'heart is yours that was mine own', admits the speaker of woman's resting place in the male version of the love relationship, and so only by a complete repudiation of the emotionally monopolising values of that tradition can an active female identity be expressed. Actively granted by the female party, and thus a positive expression of her identity, the lover's 'freedom' to dally on earth as and where he may please, does indeed make Rossetti's speaker 'free' - 'free' from the constraints imposed upon her by the subjugating affections of the male definition of

womanhood and therefore at liberty to choose now her own fate. Now deliberately divorced from the codes of patriarchal poetic ideology, and consequently exempt from the struggle to reinvent the language of the male courtly lyric from within which occupied the earlier stages of *Monna Innominata*, the speaker composes her own denouement. Earthly passions, and the conventions they rely upon for their poetic communication, have been wholly renounced; a transcendent union with God (now not at odds with, but rather a *refuge from* secular desires) is now gratefully accepted. The higher patriarchy is now warmly embraced - with God the father as the ultimate provider of salvation from the struggle.

If I could trust mine own self with your fate,
Shall I not rather trust it in God's hand?
Without Whose Will one lily doth not stand,
Nor sparrow fall at his appointed date... (XIII, 1-4)

This sonnet reinforces the tone of abdication from tradition felt in the previous two verses by further expressing the speaker's retreat from the vigorous questioning which occupied the octave of *Monna Innominata* and its painful quest for amatory and linguistic stability. All things of this world are renounced now, as the speaker requests sanction from God

Who numbereth the innumerable sand,
Who weighs the wind and water with a weight,
To Whom the world is neither small nor great,
Whose knowledge foreknew every plan we planned...
(XIII, 5-8)

These are crucial sentiments. Earthly and divine love do not contradict now, but complement each other here so long as God is in control. The

divinity can transcend the 'weights and measures [which] do us ... a wrong' alluded to in sonnet IV since God's providence is a radical principle (akin to the Derridean centre) which pervades a system and yet remains aloof from it. Now not competing with oppositional secular drives, God may re-assimilate an untarnished intelligibility. His 'knowledge foreknew every plan we planned' - by accepting the holy ordinance over and above the earthly 'plans' laid down by the phallogocentric literary tradition, Rossetti's speaker negotiates a return to *a priori* principles, a retreat into a state wholly governed by set, religious principles where she may escape the passivity imposed upon her by the male ethos and reinstate her own identity outwith profane poetic tradition. In this orthodox, ecclesiastical scheme, this purification of the love-impulse will be beneficial not just to woman, but to artistic expression in general and thus, heralding her own adoption of strictly religious forms as a writer in later life, Rossetti's speaker advocates pious discipline for her lover on earth. The recommendation is, symbolically, offered at profane poetic tradition and the (male) creators of that tradition.

Searching my heart for all that touches you,
I find there only love and love's goodwill
Helpless to help and impotent to do,
Of understanding dull, of sight most dim;
And therefore I commend you back to Him
Whose love your love's capacity can fill. (XIII, 9-14)

Poetic tradition, as conditioned by the masculine authority, has so corrupted the love relationship with its insidious ideologies of power that the venture undertaken by Rossetti's speaker in the cycle, the

expression of love from the female perspective, has failed. A pure articulation of female desire is rendered 'Helpless ... and impotent' by the codes of patriarchal poetic language structuring. Ideology masquerading as 'truth' has resulted in an anti-feminine, blinkered portrayal of the world, 'Of understanding dull, of sight most dim', and only by a recessive departure from the world thus constructed and a return to a state of innocence in God, can the duplicity be shown as such and the balance redressed. The speaker knows, by now, the impossibility of positive *action* within the codes of the male canon; the beautifully elegaic fourteenth and final sonnet, therefore, presents *inaction* (chosen and not prescribed) as the only strategy left for woman.

Youth gone, and beauty gone if ever there
Dwelt beauty in so poor a face as this;
Youth gone and beauty, what remains of bliss?
I will not bind fresh roses in my hair,
To shame a cheek at best but little fair, -
Leave youth his roses, who can bear a thorn, -
I will not seek for blossoms anywhere,
Except such common flowers as blow with corn.
Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain?
The longing of a heart pent up forlorn,
A silent heart whose silence loves and longs;
The silence of a heart which sang its songs
While youth and beauty made a summer morn,
Silence of love that cannot sing again. (XIV, 1-14)

Thus Christina Rossetti concludes what began as a reproach to the conventional love lyric with a dignified but painful confession of her inability to inhabit the terms of such a literary form. In this, Matthew Arnold's critical comments, made in his 1853 'Preface' to his own *Poems*,

upon 'situations, from the representation of which... no poetical enjoyment can be derived', are recalled.

[These situations] are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. (88)

Rossetti's speaker inhabits this state in the last poem of *Monna Innominata* but, for her, it is somewhat relieved by the self-imposed hope in divine resurrection. The final sonnet wistfully recalls the enthusiastic tones of the opening movement of the cycle, where the 'budding' of the love relationship was held to be worth cherishing and its 'blossom' was anticipated: now the speaker actively represses such desires and, pointedly, 'will not seek for blossoms anywhere'. The sequence began with a fervent yearning, on the speaker's part, to revisit 'the songs I sang / When life was sweet'. The octave of *Monna Innominata* witnessed the attempt to sing those 'songs' in a manner untethered by the restrictions of the male poetic tradition ; the attempt was unsuccessful because the culture too corrupted. On a linguistic level, also, the speaker has found no success in her attempt to reinvent patterns of signification and free them from their earthbound, phallogocentric bias. The speaker's final resolve, then, progressively enacted by the sestet of the cycle, is inevitably one of abdication from the wordly poetic arena, eschewing secular artistic passion and resigning herself to a life of ascetic humility whilst awaiting holy salvation, her final refuge now welcomed and no longer called to

justification of its terms. Her's is a 'love' (and therefore an identity) which 'cannot sing again' in a world constructed by and interpreted by men. Desire is still present - the 'silence loves and longs' - but, since the female desire has found no possible outlet in the profane patriarchal poetic structures, it must readdress itself to the divine eternal. This last sonnet is specifically about *loss*. Arnold makes a distinction between 'painful' and 'tragic' representations mental distress such as that finally conveyed in Sonnet XIV, but Rossetti's speaker's sentiments are both. It is the most moving poem of the sequence and might be taken as symbolically marking Rossetti's own withdrawal from the secular poetic arena - the doleful expression of her inability to continue with inner debate, prefacing the retreat into pious, exegetical verse and prose which she doggedly produced in the 1880s and up until her death in 1894. It is highly significant that, in a work marking the utter, unquestioning final embrace of piety by the Rossetti text, the closing sentiments are those of regret and self-imposed resignation to 'silence'.

We have showed that the sonnets which make up *Monna Innominata* move from a position of initial playfulness to one of considerable torment whose culmination lies in a self-imposed exile from the potent joys (and tribulations) of earthly love in deference to an equally self-imposed, worryingly unconvincing (prefaced as it is by so much passionate debate) faith in spiritual resurrection. In this manner, as we have noted, the speaker's ultimate acceptance of a 'silent heart whose silence loves and longs' is both acknowledgement of compromise and a sign of triumph, indicating as it does that the struggle against earthly values,

against powerful desire and its expression, has been simultaneously lost and yet, in the Christian sense, conquered (since only by accepting mutability can the spiritual afterlife be achieved). The female identity constructed by the sequence, which allows woman now to be the speaker of the amatory lyric, is, in traditional form, initially a product of the identity of the man by whom she is loved or desires to be loved. But the male-object of Christina Rossetti's work is an absence throughout the cycle - even the notion of his potential presence only serves to emphasise his actual non-attendance;

... come not yet, for it is over then,
And long it is before you come again...
Howbeit, to meet you grows almost a pang,
Because the pang of parting comes so soon...
(I, 2-3, 9-10)

The speaker of *Monna Innominata* quickly realises that to be defined by absence is to be absence and, thus, a radically different manner of interaction with the love tradition is required if female identity is fully to be asserted as an active presence. Thus, from the unique perspective of the woman poet, a abdication from the jurisdiction of phallogocentric ideology is called for - the subversion of pre-Dantean tradition which Elizabeth Barrett Browning had completely failed to undertake and which only a handful of male poets had vaguely acknowledged as a possibility through history. The withdrawal for Rossetti is total - away from questioning to a place of divinely ordered certitude where 'silence' signals faith unshaken. One recent critic has said of the theme of 'silence' which runs through much of Rossetti's verse

... we feel close to the source of Rossetti's strength as a woman and poet, and that strength, in opposition to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's, lies, not in assertive outspokenness, but rather in a baffling and defiant, sometimes ostensibly self-contradictory, sometimes masochistic, and sometimes riddling, silence. (89)

This is indeed so. At the end of the cycle, Rossetti's speaker seems a sad, worn and beaten figure, but one still with an instinct for some kind of self-preservation. She has been *frustrated* into acceptance of a God she would, it appears, be more comfortable questioning - she is willing herself to accept Him totally, unflinchingly, completely. This acceptance itself is a form of resurrection; it has to be, because it is all that remains for the broken speaker at the end of the fourteen sonnets. Rossetti's final placing of the female active poetic consciousness in the realm of silence, beyond worldly constructs, is an affirmation of power regained (or at least innocence resurrected) since it dramatically marks the final recognition of the inability of the female self to play the love lyric game on male terms (whether as passive passenger or as fallen seductress). This refusal is doubly reinforced by its implicit stemming from both the subjectivity of Christina Rossetti as a Victorian woman (at odds with patriarchal Victorian codes and values and the poets, like Barrett Browning, who are prepared unflinchingly to regurgitate them) and also, importantly, from the equally polarised subjectivity of the 'donna innominata', the woman (and *all* womankind) from history called by men to engage passively in a literary tradition which holds them trapped as second class citizens. The abnegation of the authority of traditional phallogentric ideology is, then, both effected in retrospect - thus the attention to pre-mediaeval

platitudes - and simultaneously contemporised to the Victorian present. As such, it is a timely, and a timeless critique.

At a literal level, as we have outlined, *Monna Innominata* advances its argument by a process of thematic repetition, where notions of permanence or stability, hence certitude, once established as such, are immediately recontextualised to reveal their inherent contradictory elements. Those energies which motivated the challenging tones of *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress* are clearly present in the first stages of the cycle and its resistance of complacency. At this level, the cycle is as frustrating an experience for the reader as it appears to be for the speaker, as complacency is persistently denied us - happy peace is repeatedly the harbinger of doubt and despair. This sense of rhythm, from order to chaos to order reviewed, renders the ending of the cycle not an absolute conclusion, but merely an arbitrary cut-off point where the flux has finally exhausted itself. The cycle decrees its own resting place in 'silence', on one level the same silence which the fourteen sonnets of the sequence have so radically broken by offering a voice to the 'donna innominata', herself silenced so long by tradition, yet on another level a new 'silence' since it is now a silence *chosen* and not prescribed by others. There is an implied circularity in this strategy, but it is a circularity whose centre has been disturbed by the process of revolution.

In another, linked sense, *Monna Innominata* is a revolutionary text because it quite self consciously tries to subvert the courtly love conventions to generate a psychological and aesthetic polemic which

raises questions concerning language and signification. The avowed intertextuality of the piece - its determined collusion of biblical, Dantean, Petrarchan and nineteenth century discourses - denotes a deeper desire to play off against one another various self-contained modes of intelligibility, each balanced and centred in its own right but flawed when encroached upon by another, equally inherently coherent system of thought. Literary and religious notions are stretched and placed into conflict with one another in the continuous promotion of relativity until, finally, the holy writ overcomes. As the female poet-speaker repeatedly asserts her desired union with her lover, only immediately to upset this potential stability by suddenly couching it in an alternative set of circumstances, so the text continually seeks to deconstruct (indeed to *destroy*) illusions of certitude or 'truth' as constructed by ideological patterns. This rejection of stability stems, as it does elsewhere in the works of Christina Rossetti, from the desire radically to question literary tradition and the position generally (with some exceptions which we have acknowledged) allocated to women within that phallogentric canon. The position taken by the speaker of *Monna Innominata* also has a sociological relevance to the Victorian age: it challenges nineteenth century notions of 'proper' conduct in matters amatory by readdressing the gender relationship preferred by the Victorians, as reflected in the lyric poetry of the period. At every level, Rossetti's sonnet cycle abjures absolutes and illustrates how easily ideology, if unchallenged, may pass for truth. *Monna Innominata* undertakes a process of purification - of gender-balance, of poetic practice and, essentially, of language itself - in its desire to purge poetry of the anti-female bias which has characterised the subjectivity

of the post-mediaeval love-lyric. Its difference, in this, from the position adopted at the end of *The Prince's Progress*, lies in its acceptance of orthodox Christian faith as a way out from the struggle. Christina Rossetti was to close her career in sustained celebration of that consciously developed acceptance.

Monna Innominata is a marvellously rich and allusive poem. It is the most difficult of Christina Rossetti's long poems to pin down, consistently refusing to be reduced to any one, assimilable plane until the devout belief in the divinity arrive to offer refuge. It is true to say, however, that the sequence depicts, at more than one level, an artistic resurrection for the female poet - and yet the redemption is achieved indirectly, through a series of re-evaluations and not by the route initially set out upon by the speaker. *Monna Innominata* begins by attempting a polarised inversion of the value-laden codes of conventionally expressed male sonneteering only to realise that inversion of that tradition necessitates falsely inhabiting the parameters and directives upon which it has thrived through history. Consequently, Rossetti's heroine reassesses her quest and offers herself up to holy affirmation, thereby seeking a resurrection of innocent grace through another channel. To achieve this end, earthly passion must be wholly renounced, and Rossetti's renunciation of secular desires is projected as a repudiation of the post-mediaeval lyric tradition which drove her to the quest in the first place. Abnegating a corrupt literary and intellectual form which has presented patriarchally realised ideology as the norm, *Monna Innominata* seeks refuge in a conventionally religious prognosis. The God of whom Rossetti tries to convince herself

in the course of *Monna Innominata* is embraced at the last with the simmering placidity of a conquered will - no self-satisfying reflection of certitudes on earth (as Dante's God functions) but a condition of secular instabilities. The strain felt by the cycle's speaker as the sonnets write this argument is a tension experienced in turn by the reader of the sonnets faced with a work which repeatedly denies complacency at all levels only to be forced into conventionality at the last breath; it is the culmination of a sense of strain - the tension between earthly fulfillment and devotional asceticism - running through the greater part of Rossetti's poetic output. In fact, *Monna Innominata* stands as the most important work in Christina Rossetti's canon because it provides a tremendously accurate, microcosmic image of the direction taken by Rossetti's philosophy of love and self, as recorded in her total written output through time. At a literal level, the sequence illustrates the recurring struggle between physical passion and spiritual deferralment which occupies much of the poet's lyric verse. At symbolic level, its concerns mirror the close scrutiny of inherited ideologies and their transmission through loaded patterns of signification which colours the subversive poetry of works like *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress*. By its repeated processes of recontextualisation, *Monna Innominata* seeks, like all Christina Rossetti's writing, to reveal the unreliability of given 'truths' and the inevitably unstable nature, when deconstructed, of what literary (and social) tradition has offered up as certitudes. Initially tentative in tone, the cycle grows into a complex and thorough semantic investigation, offering relativity as preferable to corrupt absolutism. The sequence finally resigns itself to a considered,

pregnant 'silence' affirmed, with a Christian God as the speaker's remaining immutable guarantee of intelligibility.

Like the speaker of *Monna Innominata*, Christina Rossetti was ultimately to turn her passions and desires towards the sanction of a divine omnipotence, concluding her career as a poet with the fervent production of tractarian, devotional literature. *Monna Innominata* provides a detailed context and a background against which the withdrawal into piety may be measured, (perhaps excused?) but, at best, understood. Again like the speaker of the fourteen sonnets, the intellectual decisions Rossetti ultimately made concerning her spiritual life stemmed not from 'happy circumstances' but from a pained evaluation of the various options available to a Victorian woman artist. The whole-hearted and dogmatic turning to God in her later years, along with the renunciation of earthly pleasures (of which, one was love-poetry itself) marks the disappearance from Rossetti's art of that active, engaging tension we have detected to be the life-force of her writing in this study thus far. It would be unfair, in an investigation of this nature, simply to ignore the later devotional work of Christina Rossetti, disappointing though it is when set beside her more inventive earlier art. If the exegetical pieces possess an unchallenging flatness and narrowness of vision which might remind us of the challenging breadth of inquisition we have found in Rossetti's earlier poetry, then an examination of them, with reference to the life they lack, is not unrewarding.

NOTES

1) References to the *Monna Innominata* sequence (*Works* pp. 58-64) are given in the main text after quotations by the number of the sonnet in the cycle and the line numbers taken from that particular sonnet.

2) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti* (London; Brown, Langham and Co., 1908) p. 93

3) *Ibid* p. 94

4) Packer, Lona M., *Christina Rossetti* p. 309

5) At the time of writing this chapter, the poem 'No, Thank You, John' was rightly referred to by James Fenton in the *Independent On Sunday* newspaper as an

excellent poem ... which stands as a
landmark in lyric, a woman's answer to
centuries of pained outpourings from chaps.

This indicates that some people, at least, are capable of shifting mentally from the particular to the general.

6) Packer, *Christina Rossetti* p. 422

7) *Ibid* p. viii.

8) Fredeman, W. E., 'Review' in *Victorian Studies*, VIII, (Sept. 1964) (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1964) pp. 71-77

9) Rossetti, Christina G., *The Face of the Deep, a Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London; S. P. C. K., 1892) p. 396

10) Oppenheimer, P., *The Birth Of The Modern Mind: Self, Consciousness and the Invention of the Sonnet* (London; Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 3

11) Crump, R. W., 'Eighteen Moments' Monuments' in Fraser, R. S. ed., *Essays On The Rossettis* (Princeton; Princeton University Library, 1972) pp. 210-29, quotation p. 210

12) Caine, T. Hall, *Recollections Of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London; Elliot Stock, 1882) p. 244

13) Going, W. T., *Scanty Plot Of Ground* (The Hague; Mouton & Co., 1976) p. 36

14) Wordsworth, William, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* 6 vols. Second Edition. ed., De Selincourt, E., Revised by Shaver, C. L., (Oxford; Clarendon, 1967) Vol. I (Early Years 1787-1805) p. 234

- 15) Lind, R. L., *Lyric Poetry Of The Italian Renaissance* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1954) p. 89
- 16) Holmes, George, *Dante* (Oxford; O. U. P., 1980) p. 6
- 17) Rossetti, D. G., *Poems And Translations 1850-1870* (London; Oxford University Press, 1913) p. 365
- 18) Petrarca, Francesco, *Selections from the Canzoniere and other works* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 59
- 19) Lind, *Lyric Poetry of the Italian Renaissance* pp. 11-13
- 20) *Ibid* p. 35
- 21) *Ibid* p. 39
- 22) Petrarca, *Selections* p. 56
- 23) Lind, *Lyric Poetry of the Italian Renaissance* p. 35
- 24) Spenser, Edmund, *Amoretti XXIIII* (New York; De Capo, 1969) pages unnumbered.
- 25) *Ibid* LIIII
- 26) Drayton, Michael, *Poems of Michael Drayton* ed., Buxton, J., (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953) p. 2
- 27) *Ibid* p. 14
- 28) *Ibid* p. 14
- 29) *Ibid* p. 14
- 30) *Ibid* p. 4
- 31) *Ibid* p. 17
- 32) Rowse, A. L. ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* Sonnet 21. p. 44
- 33) *Ibid*
- 34) *Ibid* Sonnet 130. p. 262
- 35) *Ibid* Sonnet 141. p. 284
- 36) *Ibid* Sonnet 23. p. 48
- 37) *Ibid* Sonnet 145. p. 292
- 38) Alighieri, Dante, *Purgatorio* A Verse Translation by Allen Mandelbaum (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1982) [XXIV, 57] p. 212

- 39) Holmes, *Dante* p. 8
- 40) Lind, *Lyric Poetry of the Italian Renaissance* p. 87
- 41) Cited in Holmes, *Dante* p. 10
- 42) Petrarca, *Selections* p. 23
- 43) see Doughty, Oswald, *A Victorian Romantic; Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London; Frederick Muller Ltd., 1949) p. ????
- 44) Rossetti, D. G., *The Early Italian Poets together with Dante's Vita Nuova* (London; Smith, Elder and Co., 1861)
- 45) Rossetti, D. G., *Poems And Translations 1850-70* p. 300.n.
- 46) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *Family Letters* p. 184
- 47) Weintraub, S., *Four Rossettis: A Victorian Biography* (London; W. H. Allen, 1978) p. 2.
- 48) Rossetti, W. M., 'Obituary' in *Spectator* 6 May 1854
- 49) Rossetti, Gabriele, *La Beatrice di Dante* (London; Privatera, 1842) and Rossetti, Maria F., *The Shadow of Dante* (London; Rivingtons, 1871)
- 50) Sawtell, Margaret, *Christina Rossetti* (Oxford; Mowbray & Co., 1955) p. 87. Maria Francesca Rossetti's *A Shadow Of Dante* was actually published by Rivingtons of London in November 1871 (see n. 49 above). No sources are given for the quotations attributed to Christina Rossetti in this extract.
- 51) Rossetti, D. G., *Poems And Translations 1850-70* p. 297
- 52) *Ibid* p. 325
- 53) *Ibid* p. 326
- 54) *Ibid* p. 325
- 55) *Ibid* p. 343
- 56) *Ibid* p. 339
- 57) *Ibid* p. 339
- 58) *Ibid* p. 328
- 59) *Ibid* p. 329
- 60) *Ibid* p. 346
- 61) *Ibid* p. 329

62) *Ibid* p. 372

63) *Ibid* p. 379

64) Derrida, Jacques, *Writing And Difference* (London; Routledge, 1978) p. 279. I cite this particular passage simply because it neatly and succinctly expresses what this thesis proposes to be a notion central to the *Monna Innominata* cycle and an idea crucial to an understanding of the processes of intertextuality and recontextualisation which advance Rossetti's sequence. The citation of Derrida is not offered as any form of commendation of the broad theoretical position advocated in Derrida's philosophical works.

65) Dunlop, Alexander, Introduction to *Amoretti and Epithalamion in The Shorter Poems Of Edmund Spenser: Yale Edition* (London: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 586.

66) Petrarca, *Selections* p. 1

67) *Ibid* p. 21

68) *Ibid* p. 24

69) Mommsen, Theodor E., 'Petrarch's Conception Of The Dark Ages' in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* ed. E. F. Rice Jnr. (Ithaca, 1959) pp. 106-29.

70) This elevation of Rome was nevertheless supported by a kind of sub-Platonism based upon Roman Unities of Architecture, Theatrical Form, etc. Rome became the type of the Secular Holy City - later Yeats' visionary Byzantium, Blake's Jerusalem - always potentially presented in 'real' terms, i.e. Dickens' London in *Bleak House*, Thompson's *City Of Dreadful Night*, the opposition of Wordsworth's two sonnets of 1802 on views of London.

71) Petrarca, *Selections* p. 24.

72) Harrison, A. H., *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology* (Charlottesville; Virginia U. P., 1990) p. 112

73) Bell, Mackenzie, *Christina Rossetti* (London; Thos. Burleigh, 1898) pp. 90-91

74) Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh; Nimmo, Hay & Mitchell, 1912) p. 443

75) *Ibid* pp. 447-8

76) Mermin, Dorothy, 'The Female Poet And The Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets From The Portuguese*' in *English Literature and History* 48 (1981) pp. 351-67

77) Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* p. 153

78) see note 64, this chapter, above.

79) The translations by William M. Rossetti of the epigrams (*Works*, pp. 462-3) are those used in this thesis.

80) Montefiore, J., *Feminism And Poetry* (London; Pandora, 1987) p. 128

81) Keats, John, *Poems* ed. Allott, M., pp. 650-5

82) Petrarca, *Selections* p. 35

83) Packer, *Rossetti-Macmillan Letters* p. 154

84) *Ibid* p. 155, n. 3

84) see Fowler, A., *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge; University Press, 1970) particularly Ch. 9., 'Sonnet Sequences' pp. 174-97

85) Rossetti, Gabriele, *A Versified Autobiography* translated and supplemented by W. M. Rossetti (London; Sands, 1901) pp. 137-9

86) Bateson, F. W., 'The Quickest Way Out Of Manchester' in *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London; Longmans, 1950) pp. 200-6

87) Fuller, J., *The Sonnet* (London; Methuen, 1972) p. 40

88) Arnold, Matthew, Preface to the *Poems* of 1853, in *Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold* ed. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London; Oxford University Press, 1950) p. xviii

89) Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* p. 110

6. CONCLUSION: THE DEVOTIONAL POETRY

No: at least I will not profane Holy Things;
I will not add this to all the rest. I have gone
over and over again, thinking I should come right
in time, and I do not come right. I will go no more...'
Christina Rossetti, *Maude*

Wearied of self, I turn, my God, to Thee...
Christina Rossetti, 'For Thine Own Sake, O My God'

It was proposed in the previous chapter that the intellectual route plotted by the speaker of *Monna Innominata*, the questioning of profane and holy issues eventually reconciled in a compromise-laden faith, emblematises the direction taken by Christina Rossetti's poetic output as a whole. In his *Memoir*, William Michael Rossetti, in plain and provocative terms, sums up this broad thematic shift through time;

Over-scrupulosity made Christina Rossetti shut up her mind to almost all things save the Bible, and the admonitions and ministrations of priests. To ponder for herself whether a thing was true or not ceased to be a part of her intellect. The only question was whether or not it conformed to the Bible, as viewed by Anglo-Catholicism. Her temperament and character, naturally warm and free, became 'a fountain sealed'.

(*Works*, p. lxviii)

'Impulse and *élan* were checked, both in act and in writing,' her brother continues, and his chosen image (appropriately Biblical) of 'a fountain sealed', conveying the inertia self-imposed upon a free-flowing poetic mind now subjugated to religious instruction, unwittingly recalls a maxim formulated by Christina Rossetti herself in the prose devotional calendar, *Time Flies* (1885);

Only one process there is which renders
water stable in itself: the process of freezing.
To freeze suggests discipline... (1)

This self-conscious 'freezing' into a 'fountain sealed' of the energies fuelling the best of her work hitherto examined in this thesis enabled Christina Rossetti to close her poetic career with the intense and sole production of verse and prose devotional commentaries. At the last, the

poet was able to express a stable, settled world view to replace the insecurity and doubt which, we have seen, forms the subtext to her 'secular' poetry. Yet there is something discomfiting in all this. Presented with the orthodox, religious dogma Christina Rossetti brought prolifically forth in the last quarter of her life, readers might well wonder how the interrogation and subversion of received patterns of thought motivating former work could so abruptly give way to the pious repetitions of a sensibility which had ceased 'to ponder for herself whether a thing was true or not'. Contrasting the poet's youthful writings with the reams of liturgical exposition Rossetti published in the last twenty years of her life, it is all too tempting simply to conclude, to use Christina's own words (and a sister image to that of the fountain frozen), that 'The fire has died out...' (2).

But is the above too simplistic a reading? Whilst proposing that it is, roughly, the correct overall view, I think it is one has been too simplistically argued and needs qualification and clarification. It is, certainly, a perspective worth evaluating in the terms of poetic strategy outlined in this thesis, rather than one which should pass unchallenged. In the past, critics have tended to ignore (or brush underneath the carpet for convenience's sake) Christina Rossetti's devotional writing - a rather unreasonable approach, since the religious prose and poetry taken together forms most of her total published output. Those commentators who have taken the time actively to condemn the religious writing have generally treated it as a uniform ideological mass, declining to give attention to individual works within that bulk and failing to observe any development or alteration of method or tone from

the earlier to the later devotional pieces. Of course, this is a tempting trap to fall into where any writer's overtly religious productions are concerned. J. J. McGann begins an essay entitled 'The Religious Poetry Of Christina Rossetti' with an observation of this tendency;

One of the difficulties which explicitly Christian
poetry or art presents for criticism is its appearance
of thematic uniformity. (3)

When we turn, shortly, to specific analysis of various devotional pieces from the Rossetti canon we will detect not just the 'appearance of thematic uniformity' but the gradual movement towards a steadfast adherence to this stable code in the work a writer who has previously, actively resisted such a complacent adoption of stability. As this study has aimed to show, the earlier 'secular' lyrics through *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress* repeatedly warned of the dangers of blinkered acceptance of ideology masquerading as truth or certitude. *Monna Innominata*, in attempting, dramatically, the construction of a new, radical centre of intelligibility ended in a compromised nod towards religious credence as a guiding principle hinted at throughout the Rossetti canon but never comfortably assimilated into the overall philosophical scheme. The later, religious writings of Christina Rossetti, we will show, demonstrate a sustained, last gasp attempt at resolution and comfortability. It is the concluding argument of this thesis that, not just the devotional work *per se*, but the implications behind that work - the final rejection of doubt and the gradual development of Rossetti's art inexorably towards this position - further

define and reinforce (by default) the poetic strategy we have observed in this study thus far.

Religion was always the prominent guiding factor in Christina Rossetti's life. In 1968, the critic J. A. Kohl uncovered a statement handwritten by the one-time Rossetti family physician, Dr. Hare, affirming that Christina was diagnosed as suffering from 'a kind of religious mania' when she was in her middle teens (4). The two offers of marriage she received, in 1848 and 1866 respectively, were both declined on pious grounds, and at one point we know that she considered taking orders, as had her sister Maria, to become an Anglican nun (5). In the final fifteen years of her life, Christina Rossetti's Anglican beliefs so increasingly dominated her inner and outer existence that the latter part of her literary career is occupied with the near exclusive production of unswervingly exegetical verse and prose. The casting of the self and its motives before divine sanction, alluded to as a possibility in the earlier lyric poems and (pain)fully dramatised in *Monna Innominata*, with its simultaneous repudiation of worldly pleasures, accurately prefigures the ultimate path chosen by the author herself.

Of course, and as we have seen, the acknowledgement of Christian faith, and the refuge it offered to the troubled soul, was always a visible element in Rossetti's poetry, as it was in her life. Religion held a fascination for Christina; she repeatedly returned to Christian doctrine as affirmatory, a granter of certitude (unprovable, but equally undeniable) in a world of whose immutability and contradictions she felt painfully aware. This agonising dichotomy of sensitivity is at the heart

of many of Christina Rossetti's finest poems: that she was conscious of this governing tension in her life is evident in part of a moving letter written to her ailing brother, Dante Gabriel, in 1881 (the year *Monna Innominata* was published), four months before his untimely death.

... I want to assure you that, however
harassed by memory or anxiety you may be, I have
(more or less) heretofore gone through the same ordeal.
I have borne myself till I became unbearable by
myself, and then I have found help in confession
and absolution and spiritual counsel, and relief
inexpressible. Twice in my life I tried to suffice
myself with measures short of this, but nothing
would do; the first time was of course in my youth
before my general confession, the second time was when
circumstances had led me (rightly or wrongly) to break
off the practice. But now for years past I have
resumed the habit, and I hope not to continue it
profitlessly... I ease my own heart by telling you
all this... (6)

The marriage proposals of Collinson and Caley are the instances directly referred to in the letter, but the overall importance of the orthodox Christian outlet on a life otherwise trapped in flux and uncertainties is apparent in the resigned yet firm tone of the missive. Five hundred (about half in total) of the published poems of Christina Rossetti deal explicitly with religious matters and, as we have seen, many of the verses normally classified as 'secular' ('An Old World Thicket' and *Monna Innominata*, for example) have an overtly devotional, frequently eschatological undertow (7). As we saw in Chapter 1 of this study, it is possible to read Rossetti's early poetry as progressively mediating between religious and artistic (Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite) values in a kind of pantheistic synthesis of nature as analogous of God's power, eventually settling on the side of religion as divine truth for its own

sake. The general movement is taken as being from the vision of God through the symbolic veil of Nature to discarding the veil and focusing sole attention onto the form of the divinity Himself. 'Earth And Heaven' (*Works*, p. 84), written on 28th December 1844 when Christina was just fourteen years of age, is one of the simplest expressions of this dualistic treatise. The short poem begins with a naturalistic listing of God's beautiful works and culminates in the plainer admission of the 'unchanging... undying' divine Love which made the earthly works.

Water calmly flowing,
Sunlight deeply glowing,
Swans some river riding
That is gently gliding
By the fresh green rushes,
The sweet rose that blushes,
Hyacinths whose dower
Is both scent and flower,
Skylark's soaring motion...
...All these are beautiful,
Of beauty earth is full:
Say, to our promised heaven
Can greater charms be given?
Yes, for aye in heaven doth dwell,
Glowing, indestructible,
What here below finds tainted birth
In the corrupted sons of earth:
For, filling there and satisfying
Man's soul unchanging and undying,
Earth's fleeting joys and beauties far above,
In heaven is Love.

This neat little poem foreshadows the tone of Hopkins in pieces such as 'Pied Beauty' and sets a blueprint for many of Christina Rossetti's supposedly 'secular' poems. All the characteristic elements are there; the sensual opening, languid and enjoying earthly riches, the *volta* marked by the open, rhetorical questioning of the value of the preceeding images, and, finally, the denouement wherein divine principles and their

everlasting virtue are extolled over and above their temporal, earthly reflections. 'Glowing, indestructible' heavenly spirit finds only 'tainted birth' in its earthly manifestation and thus the speaker advocates a return to first principles in the final lines, preferring immutability in the afterlife to fleeting existence on earth.

A microcosmic version of the Rossetti philosophy? Only speaking in the broadest terms could one really concur with this proposition. This lyric (like, we will argue, the later 'devotional' writing) contains none of the tension, the discomfort and sense of strain, which pervades the poetry Rossetti wrote between the time of 'Earth And Heaven' (1844) and the mid-1870s, (after which, exegetical literature dominates) epitomised in the agonising compromise reached by the speaker of *Monna Innominata*. The intense measure of suffering and sense of mutability which pervades lyrics such as 'An End' (*Works*, p. 292), 'After Death' (*Works*, pp. 292-3), 'Remember' (*Works*, p. 294), and 'Withering' (*Works*, p. 297) marks a regression from certitude, consistently re-enacted in Rossetti's poetry right up to the religious works of the 1880s, where the dissatisfaction with absolutes and the mood of disquiet is transmuted to a feeling of relief, the paradisal ideal unflinchingly accepted and embraced in a resurrected vision of eternal heavenly bliss. The eclectic, provocative intertextuality of *Goblin Market*, *The Prince's Progress* and *Monna Innominata*, symptomatic of a centreless, pluralsitic approach to meaning, gives way to singular, dogmatic textual duplications of Biblical pronouncements. Longing becomes fulfillment and doubt becomes faith; but is this at the expense of interesting poetry?

Ifor Evans, discussing Christina Rossetti in *English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century* (1933), recognised the beneficial effect, so far as the immediate appeal of the poetry is concerned, of the dichotomy between earthly and spiritual impulses inscribed in the early lyrics. The tension between 'sensuous acceptance of life' and fearful endurance of sin is seen as a positive factor giving energy to the verse;

Her early poetry dwells in a latent conflict
between these two motives. They resolve themselves,
a little sadly, in a faith in Christianity which
is at once passionate and sombre. This devout other-
worldliness leaves Christina Rossetti with a deep,
somewhat baffled antagonism to life. (8)

One year earlier, R. D. Waller had been even more to the point with his terse observation;

Very little of [Christina Rossetti's] best verse
is directly inspired by her religion... (9)

Both estimations are accurate. The poems in which Christina Rossetti directly, wholly makes the Christian doctrine her subject seem flat and uninspiring when set aside those lyrics where religion indirectly colours the argument, or longer works like *Goblin Market* or 'The Convent Threshold' (*Works*, pp. 340-2), where devotional faith lurks enigmatically in the background offering itself as one possible (but not the only) centre of interpretation, never as an absolute truth. The prose short story, *Maude, A Story For Girls*, written as early as 1850 but never published until 1897, after Christina's death, is instructive here (10). In an alarmingly accurate (and acutely self-conscious) manner, the tale

prefigures the tensions, and their reconciliation, which form the context influencing Christina Rossetti's eventual gravitation towards purely exegetical work. Competently, though never masterfully written, the novella tells of a year in the life of Maude Foster, fifteen years old at the start of the story, who enjoys nothing more than composing little verses, often playful, occasionally introspective, but feels acutely uncomfortable with the minor celebrity status her poems have brought her in her family's immediate social circle. The perils of undertaking a poetic career when one's convictions are predominantly ascetic and pious are conveyed by the rather sedentary plot; of more interest is Maude's mounting psychological turmoil - her dilemma becomes a melodramatic version of that contemplated by the speaker of *Monna Innominata*, the attempted reconciliation of worldly luxuries and pious humility. Haunted by the belief that her profane indulgences make her unworthy of receiving Holy Communion, and after much heartache, Maude makes a painful, never wholly credible decision to renounce her poetic excursions, and therefore her vanity, in favour of a life devoted to the church. Only with her death in a coach accident is the work's ongoing moral crisis brought to a definite conclusion. The narrative is obviously semi-autobiographical (hence, perhaps, the non-publication of *Maude* during its author's lifetime). At one point, the description given of Maude could quite easily pass, word for word, for a portrait of the youthful Christina Rossetti herself;

Small, though not positively short, she might easily be overlooked but would not easily be forgotten. Her figure was slight and well made, but appeared almost high-shouldered through a habitual shrugging stoop. Her features were regular and pleasing; as a child she had been very pretty; and might have

continued so but for a fixed paleness, and an expression, not exactly of pain, but languid and preoccupied to a painful degree. Yet even now, if at any time she became thoroughly aroused and interested, her sleepy eyes would light up with wonderful brilliancy, her cheeks glow with warm colour, her manner become animated, and drawing herself up to her full height she would look more beautiful than ever she did as a child. So Mrs Foster said, and so unhappily Maude knew. She also knew that people thought her clever, and that her little copies of verses were handed about and admired. Touching these same verses, it was the amazement of everyone what could make her so broken hearted as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote very foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret source of uneasiness; while some simply set her down as affected. Perhaps there was a degree of truth in all these opinions. (11)

Observations such as this show an authorial awareness of the way in which artistic productions will be (mis)read, and are in accordance with Christina Rossetti's own intimations in favour of pluralistic interpretation - whether they be set out in letters concerning *The Prince's Progress* or symbolically framed in the poetry itself. Like Christina Rossetti, the heroine presented in the above passage, by means of multiple perspectives, is quite definitely an enigma. William Michael Rossetti, in his 'Prefatory Note' to the story is quick to address the similarities between Miss Foster and her author;

... my sister's main object in delineating Maude was to exhibit what she regarded as defects in her own character, and in her attitude towards her social circle and her religious obligations...

... If some readers opine that all this shows Christina Rossetti's mind to have been at that date over burdened with conscientious scruples, of an extreme and even a wire drawn kind, I share their opinion. (12)

But in the short story, as in Rossetti's poetry, it is the 'wire drawn' tension, the intellectual balancing of pride and humility, *carpe diem* and pious deferral of sensuality which gives life to the writing. Maude is described early in the tale as

... one who, without telling lies, was
determined not to tell the truth. (13)

Her struggle is an inner one, the 'To be or not to be' dilemma when to 'be' is to be 'exposed' to life's profane pleasures. Like her creator, Miss Foster is painfully aware of all that which she is *not*;

'How I envy you,' she continued
in a low voice, as if speaking rather to herself
than to her hearers: you who live in the country,
and are exactly what you appear, and never wish
for what you do not possess. I am sick of display,
and poetry, and acting.' (14)

Told, midway through the narrative, that a friend has 'entered in her noviciate in the Sisterhood of Mercy', Maude dolefully confesses her own partially realised devotional outlook;

Maude half-sighed; and then answered:
'You cannot imagine me either fit or inclined
for such a life; still I can perceive that those
who are so are very happy...' (15)

In *Maude*, Rossetti's transparent version of her self suffers immense mental trauma through the self-imposed division of her existence into what Charlotte Brontë called 'propensities' and 'principles'. The crisis

is one of vocation: her pious convictions can never be fully realised so long as she participates in the oppositional, secular pleasures of the world, pleasures wholly enacted through imaginative poetic excursion - this being Victorian England, and Foster/Rossetti being of the female sex. This cataclysmic inner debate is deftly conveyed in one of the sonnets Maude (or, rather, Rossetti) copies into her 'writing-book';

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:
But it is harder to bear hated life;
To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;
To drag the heavy chains whose every link
Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink
Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife
With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife
Nor strike home: this is courage as I think.
Surely to suffer is more than to do:
To do is quickly done; to suffer is
Longer and full of heart-sicknesses... (16)

The laboured repetitions of the infinitive construction here - 'to bear... to strive... to drag...' - create an accumulative sense of strain in the text, leading to the pained admittance, bred of devout asceticism, 'Surely to suffer is more than to do'. The speaker's literal discomfort, relayed in the octave is, by association, felt with the conclusion reached in the poem. The plaintive expression of earthly hardship - the hardship self-imposed through repudiation of worldly things - is, in itself, a challenge to the pious conclusion reached: slowly, awkwardly, the religious maxim 'to suffer is more than to do' is forced to justify itself. Notably, the ambiguously rhetorical 'Surely...' begins a sestet which is all one sentence, concluding in an all-encompassing question mark;

Surely to suffer is more than to do:
To do is quickly done; to suffer is
Longer and more full of heart-sicknesses:
Each day's experience testifies of this:
Good deeds are many, but good lives are few;
Thousands taste the full cup; who drains the lees?

Though the whole sonnet attempts an affirmation of its central motif, its elements - the false bravado of the opening 'Yes...', the lame assertions '... as I think', and 'Surely...', and the ominous final interrogation mark - conspire to contradict the confident opening and leave only an ominous sense of doubt. The phrase 'to the lees', appropriately, puts one in mind of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' (published 1842) and the assertive 'I will drink/Life to the lees' of that poem - another work full of ambivalences and superficial gestures towards certainty that the text itself serves to undermine (17). The speaker of Rossetti's sonnet seems to have a bitter taste in her mouth. Trying to convince herself of the appropriateness to her life of religious dogma, she fails, as does the sonnet, to convince the reader. But the very attempt at justification is what makes the poem *interesting*. The pious sentiments are not simply offered up pat, but are put to the test of contextualisation (a characteristic Rossetti technique, as we have seen in previous chapters), making the poetry more than propaganda, more than dogma. This is the manner of 'devotional' poetry which we would wish to salvage for the Rossetti canon; the best of Rossetti's religious lyrics (predominantly the earlier verses) exhibit this inquisitive approach to matters of holy writ and reveal a restless mind undergoing the same intellectual strain and inner torment as that outwardly expressed by Maude Foster. 'A Portrait' (*Works*, pp. 286-7) utilises a bipartite

structure in order to offer varying perspectives on the same religious principle. The first of the two sonnets is the later of the couple, written on 21 November 1850, whereas its partner is dated 24 February 1847, when Christina Rossetti was only sixteen years old. The first stanza outlines a pattern of renunciation akin to that chosen by the heroine of *Maude*.

She gave up beauty in her tender youth,
Gave all her hope and joy and pleasant ways;
She covered up her eyes lest they should gaze
On vanity, and chose the bitter truth.
Harsh towards herself, towards others full of ruth,
Servant of servants, little known to praise,
Long prayers and fasts trenched
on her nights and days:
She schooled herself to sights and sounds uncouth...

Besides foreshadowing to a great extent the road taken by Christina Rossetti's own life, these descriptive lines demonstrate, without passing judgement, the process of withdrawal, of retreat from life undertaken by the woman described, again by stolid repetition of forms - 'She gave up... Gave up... She covered up... She schooled herself... ' The tone of the sonnet is one of absolute detachment; the ascetic life of the heroine is neither praised nor condemned. The ambiguous phrase 'little known to praise' conveys this unspecified relation - is she 'little known to praise others' or 'little acquainted with praise by others of herself?', And yet, because of this rigidly objective (and therefore open to plural interpretation) presentation of the symptoms of her piousness, the motives behind the renunciatory process outlined are left painfully undisclosed. The heroine hides her eyes 'lest they should gaze/On vanity', but the reason for eschewing this vanity is withheld. Equally,

the preferable 'truth' is a 'bitter' option - but bitter to whom, and why? Of course, it could be said that the frugal existence pursued by the heroine is reinforced by an equally austere poetic presentation. But, if this is the case, then the poem's catalogue of unpleasant terms - 'bitter... Harsh... trenched... uncouth... stricken... hurt and loss... hated' - grow to dominate the tone of the piece so that the pervasive atmosphere is one of unease and discomfort. The images of rote discipline are also unsettling - 'She schooled... learned... counting...' - implying that the asperitic life is not one found through natural, but through conditioned impulse. This uncertain, odd atmosphere is one which the final lines of the sonnet must go some way towards justifying;

... her own self learned she to forsake,
Counting all earthly gain but hurt and loss.
So with calm will she chose and bore the cross
And hated all for love of Jesus Christ.

We have been given so few tangible indicators as to interpretation, that the tone of detached observation here verges on the ironic. It is certainly neither dogmatic nor confident; the heroine's motives, through not being evaluated by the speaker, are open to question. Consequently, we look to the second sonnet of the pair for instruction and, hopefully, enlightenment; what we stumble upon is an awkwardly conventional, sugary trite deathbed scene;

They knelt in silent anguish by her bed,
And could not weep; but calmly there she lay.
All pain had left her; and the last sun's ray
Shone through upon her, warming into red
The shady curtains. In her heart she said:
'Heaven opens; I leave these and go away;
The Bridegroom calls, - shall the Bride seek to stay?'

Then low upon her breast she bowed her head.
O lily flower, O gem of priceless worth,
O dove with patient voice and patient eyes,
O fruitful vine amid the land of dearth,
O maid replete with loving purities,
Thou bowest down thy head with friends on earth
To raise it with the saints in Paradise.

The drifting, in the sestet, into the realms of conventional, sub-Biblical metaphor effectively marks a retreat from actual justification of the preceeding terms of the poem. (Although the attempted heightening of language through the lofty imaging is a lame attempt at self-justification, trying to make us feel better about the denouement perhaps.) The pat offering of devotional cliché, especially in the final couplet, assumes no energy other than the deceptive strength of dogmatic conviction. But this affirmatory sonnet was written three and a half years before its partner. With the production of the prefatory sonnet, as in writing the narrative section of *The Prince's Progress*, Rossetti adopts the position of critic and interpreter of her own poetry. Notably, the resulting critique, the first poem of the duet, forms an overture not of harmonious justification, but of ambivalently presented premises. 'A Portrait', taken as a whole, uses deceptive linguistic placings and an overtly dualistic structure to undermine what, superficially, seems a coherent, Christian creed. Another bipartite, two sonnet work, 'Two Thoughts Of Death' (*Works*, pp. 298-9), written in 1850, manages the same gentle mood of dissention. With debts to Romanticism, in its emphasis on memory, and the Metaphysicals, in its Marvellian burial image, 'Two Thoughts Of Death' interpolates the provocative detachment of 'A Portrait' with a tone of curious bitterness. The speaker contemplates the death of a sister figure, now in her grave;

Her heart that loved me once is rottenness
Now and corruption; and her life is dead
That was to have been one with mine, she said...
... Foul worms fill up her mouth so sweet and red;
Foul worms are underneath her graceful head;
Yet these, being born from nothingness,
These worms are certainly flesh of her flesh.

The speaker (whose persona is rendered tantalisingly indistinct by the puzzling statement 'her life... /That was to have been one with mine') shows him/herself painfully aware of mutability on earth, resignedly observing of the grass and flowers 'brave and fresh' which cover the loved one's grave;

Even as her beauty hath passed quite away,
Theirs too shall be as though it hath not been.

The mood of this first sonnet is predominantly resentful and acerbic, interrupting, right from its petulant opening line 'Her heart that loved me once is rottenness', traditionally elegaic expectations by means of a deliberate confusion of physical and metaphysical images of 'rottenness... and corruption'. The second sonnet immediately recontextualises the speaker's bitterness by placing it in past time;

So I said underneath the dusky trees...

The subsequent vision of a 'sunlighted' moth 'that rapidly/Rose toward the sun' relieves the speaker's abject sense of flux and change as (s)he watches its flight up 'From earth.../... into the light', symbolically insinuating the appropriateness of belief in the resurrection of the dead

to assuage the speaker's troubled mind (and yet, also presenting a picture of vulnerability and self-destruction - the moth flying into the flame);

Then my heart answered me: Thou fool, to say
That she is dead whose night is turned to day,
And no more shall her day turn back to night.

As in 'A Portrait', the moral offered is an orthodox Christian code and the speaker's conviction in offering the moral rings strangely hollow. The 'moth' image, in its own way, is as trite as the archaic, lofty diction of 'A Portrait' and, again, the overwhelming atmosphere of the poem taken as a whole is one of unease; the disquiet of the first sonnet is not fully appeased by the somewhat twee assertion of piousness in the second. Superficially 'proving' the theocentric philosophy which colours the denouement of the two 'Thoughts', the speaker only manages to cast doubt upon its relevance to the work taken as a complete exposition. There is no sense of overall unity; the centre cannot hold because the speaker's faith in it is by no means absolute. There is a disturbing air of tension about these works and their insidious, calculated detachment which exemplifies the unease with which ecclesiastical (and in 'A Portrait', specifically Biblical) dogma is relayed in Rossetti's earlier devotional poetry. 'For all that was but showed what all was not' - God as a centre of intelligible thought is only one option thus far. It is as if the speaker is not herself convinced of her words' authority, yet, frightened of declaring her outright scepticism, she couches her lack of conviction in the subtlest, most ambiguous terms. Many critics have, rightly, commented upon

Christina Rossetti's remarkably acute control of language and vocabulary; it is from awareness of this fine line between doubt and (blasphemous) objection that the need for such rigorous control arises.

Sometimes, in the earlier devotional pieces, the tension felt at accepting the divine ordination is so strong that it cannot be kept at a subtextual level. One of the most harrowing and moving of Christina Rossetti's short poems is 'A Chilly Night' (*Works*, pp. 321-2), dealing with the speaker's 'dead of night' search for 'my Mother's ghost'. The piece was written in February 1856, thirty years before the death of Frances Polidori in London, and therefore clearly resists autobiographical reading, but a simultaneous resistance of an orthodox, Christian perspective also pervades the text. The speaker presents a nocturnal vision, a quest to discover the maternal spirit in the hope of obtaining affirmatory knowledge of the heavenly afterlife. Initially, the speaker assumes an affinity with the spectres;

My friends had failed one by one,
Middle-aged, young, and old,
Till the ghosts were warmer to me
Than my friends that had grown cold.

The simple, plainly expressed sentiments themselves exude a manner of half-realised eeriness in the 'ghostly' narrative as the quester attempts communion with the deceased Mother figure;

I looked and I saw the ghosts
Dotting plain and mound:
They stood in the blank moonlight,
But no shadow lay on the ground:
They spoke without a voice

And they leaped without a sound.

I called: 'O my Mother dear,' -
I sobbed: 'O my Mother kind,
Make a lonely bed for me
And shelter it from the wind...

In this remanaged Dantean setting, Rossetti's speaker fails to obtain the solace and affirmation she is looking for. The shadowless ghosts 'without a voice... without a sound' have nothing of certitude to communicate, and the discovery of the Mother figure is particularly heart-rending for this reason. Literally, the spectre and the living being cannot relate to each other;

My mother raised her eyes,
They were blank and could not see:
Yet they held me with their stare
While they seemed to look at me.

She opened her mouth and spoke;
I could not hear a word,
While my flesh crept on my bones
And every hair was stirred.

She knew that I could not hear
The message that she told
Whether I had long to wait
Or soon should sleep in the mould:
I saw her toss her shadowless hair
And wring her hands in the cold.

I strained to catch her words,
And she strained to make me hear;
But never a sound of words
Fell on my straining ear.

Desiring confirmation (or at least clarification) of her devotional expectations, the speaker is left 'in pain' of irresolution as the attempted communication fails. The ghosts have no answers, and the

tension of the poetry proceeds from its own, similar uncertain position. Like its speaker, the text seeks revelation of certitude; like its speaker, the text fails to find it. Absolute dejection follows, as the speaker (and thus the poem) is left with a sense of utter isolation from the prospective comfort offered by belief in the heavenly eternal;

From midnight to the cockcrow
I watched till all were gone,
Some to sleep in the shifting sea
And some under turf and stone:
Living had failed and dead had failed,
And I was indeed alone.

'A Chilly Night' dramatically enacts the strain of irresolution which girds Christina Rossetti's finest theological expositions. It also epitomises the poems in which, to use William Michael Rossetti's description,

an aspiration for rest after the turmoil
of this mundane life is more marked than the yearning
for heavenly bliss. As to these cognate topics, it may
be remarked in general that Christina's poems contemplate
(in accordance with a dominant form of Christian belief)
an 'intermediate state' of perfect rest and inchoate
beatific vision before the day of judgement and the
resurrection of the body and sanctification in
heaven.

(18)

This 'intermediate state' inhabited by Rossetti's earlier religious writings is also an *indeterminate* state - a limbo realm which offers rest from debate and frustrated attempts at affirmation and yet allows no development of certainty concerning the heavenly afterlife it claims to prefigure. This sense of vacillation is most explicitly presented in

'The Poor Ghost' (*Works*, pp. 359-60), written in July 1863. The first speaker again finds herself faced with a spectre from the afterlife, only this time the meeting is instigated by the ghost, a former lover, who, unlike the phantoms of 'A Chilly Night', communicates visually and verbally with the shocked living party.

'Oh whence do you come, my dear friend, to me,
With your golden hair all fallen below your knee,
And your face as white as snowdrops on the lea,
And your voice as hollow as the hollow sea?'

'From the other world I come back to you:
My locks are uncurled with dripping drenching dew,
You know the old, whilst I know the new:
But tomorrow you shall know this too.'

'Oh not to-morrow into the dark, I pray;
Oh not to-morrow, too soon to go away:
Here I feel warm and well-content and gay:
Give me another year, another day.'

The whole poem is set out as a pattern of alternating dialogue - quatrain by quatrain for the first four stanzas, a pair of quatrains for the earthbound speaker, then a final twelve lines to the ghost. This carefully executed structural imbalance conveys a sense of awkwardness and upset to the piece reflected in the content of the spoken exchanges. The living speaker regards the ghost as something of an intrusion and desires not to 'know the new' of the 'other world'. The sad appearance of the spectre as described - a bedraggled, pallid wretch, and certainly no angel - only confirms the living lover's sense of the mutability of things, and supports her fear that to die will be to pass 'into the dark' as 'death mars all, which we cannot mend.' The quaint, but sinister poem closes with the ghost's bitterness at finding this lapse in the living

partner's faith, which had seemed so strong in former days. The result is an incompatibility of the two philosophies, profane and Christian, as stressed as it was in 'A Chilly Night'.

'... Never doubt I will leave you alone
And not wake you rattling bone with bone.

'I go home alone to my bed,
Dug deep at the foot and deep at the head,
Roofed in with a load of lead,
Warm enough for the forgotten dead.

'But why did your tears soak through the clay,
And why did your sobs wake me where I lay?
I was away, far enough away:
Let me sleep now till the Judgement Day.

As the inhabitants of these poems look to the 'Judgement Day' for affirmation or otherwise of faith, the Rossetti text itself enacts a deferral of judgement, conveyed in the overwhelming sense of irresolution which pervades these eschatological inquiries. Like the limbo-held spectre and perplexed speaker of 'The Poor Ghost' ('poor' on whose terms?) the early devotional poetry is prone to existence in a realm of uncertainty, as much as is the 'secular' work examined elsewhere in this study - even when the attempt at devout pronouncement is a purely exegetical one. The opening section of 'Wrestling' (*Works*, pp. 247-8), a liturgical prayer which has the repeated refrain 'Lord give us strength' openly admits the sense of incomplete faith and strain integral to Rossetti's inner debate;

Alas my Lord,
How should I wrestle all the livelong night
With Thee my God, my strength and my delight?

How can it need

So agonized an effort and a strain
To make thy face of mercy shine again?

How can it need
Such wringing out of breathless prayer to move
Thee to thy wanted love, when Thou art Love?

'Wrestling', in its very title, acknowledges the dynamic, questioning perspective Rossetti brings to devotional matters in her best religious verse. Her presentation of holy letter is informed with 'agonized an effort and a strain' coincident with that refusal idly to accept any ideology (phallogocentric, patriarchal...) which characterises all her writing observed in this study thus far. The 'wringing out of breathless prayer', as opposed to an unquestioning regurgitation of pious dogma, makes the devotional poetry Rossetti wrote before 1875 often as challenging and as exciting as pieces such as *Goblin Market*, in its refusal of complacency, and prepares the ground for the masterpiece of sustained uncertainty, *Monna Innominata*. Like the speaker of the 'Sonnet of Sonnets', Rossetti fails to discover a settled perspective, a stable centre, as the notion of a theocentric existence is set forth only to be contradicted and recontextualised in these formative religious works. Hence two sonnets, written only six months apart, may address the same eschatological issue and arrive at completely antithetical conclusions. 'A Pause' (*Works*, p. 308) relates the affirmed, pious perspective of a recently deceased speaker whose soul awaits judgement. The dramatic conclusion is one of traditional Christian iconography;

... first my spirit seemed to scent the air
Of Paradise; then first the tardy sand
Of time ran golden; and I felt my hair
Put on a glory, and my soul expand.

Notably, whenever Rossetti seeks to confirm the litany, she does so by the adoption of self-justifying, Christian imagery. In 'Dead Before Death' (*Works*, pp. 313-4), the same premises as in 'A Pause' are explored and yet the conclusion is markedly oppositional to that offered in the earlier, yet roughly contemporary sonnet;

All lost the present and the future time,
All lost, all lost, the lapse that went before:
So lost till death shut-to the opened door,
So lost from chime to everlasting chime,
So cold and lost for ever evermore.

Here, the language remains plain and deliberately stolid, as the speaker drives home the notion of mutability and the finality of death. Taken separately, these two sonnets offer self-contained statements of belief, oppositional but, respectively, coherently phrased. Taken together, the poems generate a controversy in their polarised visions, and it is the resulting tension between contradictory ideological stances which finds its way into Christina Rossetti's best devotional work. These poems, by subtly (or sometimes openly) deconstructing their own propositions, reveal the sensibility of a poet-mind, as Packer has put it, 'hardly ready for the religious dedication to which she aspired' (19). As we have seen, argument and debate is always preferable to complacency in this poet's writing, and Rossetti's work thrives upon the consequent sense of strain; nowhere in the devotional poetry is that struggle more evident than in the remarkably affecting piece 'The Convent Threshold' (*Works*, pp. 340-2).

'The Convent Threshold', written on 9 July 1858, is a work pregnant with fearful doubt, swerving between a desire passively to embrace the holy writ and the need actively to question its authority. Its main theme, like that of *Monna Innominata*, is one of pained renunciation, enacted through a process of reverberative juxtapositions - of pious and profane ideologies, of guilt and repentance, and, latterly, of dramatically relayed dream visions. The work's title provides an effective placing of Rossetti's conscience, as conveyed in her earlier religious works - on the 'threshold' of convental (conventional) belief and yet finding the crossing into unquestioning faith a troubled, complicated procedure. In the first three lines of the poem, a tone of prohibition and painful separation is immediately engendered by a bold statement echoing the plot of Shakespeare's *Romeo And Juliet*.

There's blood between us, love, my love,
There's father's blood, there's brother's blood;
And blood's a bar I cannot pass.

Straightaway, the power of earthly (patriarchal) ideology is acknowledged by the speaker in the 'blood' image disruptive of a desired, bonded state of unity. However, this bold familial overture is not pursued in the elusive narrative which follows, but proffered as a symbolic standard by which the rest of the work's attempts at unification may be gauged. The speaker immediately appeals to the symbolic realm as her profane guilt and the desire to purge it are expressed in a welter of orthodox, scriptural imagery.

I choose the stairs that mount above,
Stair after golden sky-ward stair,

To city and to sea of glass.
My lily feet were soiled with mud,
With scarlet mud which tells a tale
Of hope that was, of guilt that was,
Of love that shall not yet avail;
Alas, my heart, if I could bare
My heart, this selfsame stain is there:
I seek the sea of glass and fire
To wash the spot, to burn the snare;
Lo, stairs are meant to lift us higher:
Mount with me, mount the kindled stair.

This plaintive, sermonic tone, employing deliberately placed gospel imagery, is the first manner of address inhabited, as the dramatic monologue maps out the dynamic, complex interplay of 'hope that was' and 'guilt that was' felt by the avowedly repentant speaker, as she addresses her unrepentant lover still enjoying a sensuous life on earth. 'Your eyes look earthward, mine look up', notes the speaker, as the text conveys a split, fractured sense of existence whose internal tensions effectively dismiss absolute certitude from the poem's debate. Thus the subtle disturbance of certainty in the speaker's exclamatory 'Lo, stairs are meant to lift us higher' - *meant to*, rather than the affirmatory 'will' casts a telling mantle of qualification about the purportedly positive statement, as the speaker tries to convince the addressee of the sanctity of the divine writ she calculatedly invokes here. A heavenly vision of 'the far-off city grand... where the righteous sup' is constructed, directly followed by a luscious picture of the earthly life of 'Young men and women', imaged in wanton, sensuous terms that recall the descriptive passages of *Goblin Market*;

Milk-white, wine-flushed among the vines,
Up and down leaping, to and fro,
Most glad, most full, made strong with wines,
Blooming as peaches pearled with dew,

Their golden windy hair afloat,
Young men and women come and go.

This is the vision the speaker aspires to reject and yet, within the fiction of the poem, must partly retain in its direct associations with the loved one who still inhabits this bacchanalian scene. The goblins of *Goblin Market* were vendors of language: similarly, in 'The Convent Threshold' the speaker is trying symbolically to 'sell' religious faith to her dallying lover, and yet the powerful tensions established in the text's exploration of bonds (lovers on earth) painfully severed (separation of belief) lead, in the work's middle section, to the speaker's unease with the faith in which she herself has invested. First, she begs with her loved one to follow the same path as herself;

Repent with me, for I repent.
Woe's me the lore I must unlearn!
Woe's me the easy way we went,
So rugged when I would return!
How long until my sleep begin,
How long shall stretch these nights and days?

The unrepentant loved one addressed is urged to 'Flee for your life... Kneel, wrestle, knock, do violence, pray' whilst there is still time left for renunciation. This atmosphere of violently ascetic repudiation of luxury colours the speaker's own words with a measure of unease emphasised by the solipsistic nature of the admonishments. Beginning with a demand that her lover repent, the speaker proceeds to list her *own* troubled state of purgatorial suffering. The repetitions of 'Woe's me... Woe's me...' and 'O weary... O weary...' do little to assert the speaker's confidence in the ultimate worth of the path she advocates.

The wistful reconstruction of the 'joy that went before' interacts with the antithetical 'weary Lent' informing the speaker's present state to disturb any sense of harmony as regards the poem's attempted embrace of Christian redemption. The speaker's tone is more one of sheer panic at her own predicament than the expected one of reassurance that the proper road to salvation has now been taken. There is a cutting irony in the phrase 'Surely... she prays' - the would-be repentant speaker's prayers are those of despair rather than certitude. Even the promised Paradisal vision cannot now escape the atmosphere of disquiet the speaker has herself instilled in the text thus far;

How should I rest in Paradise,
Or sit on the steps of heaven alone?
If Saints and Angels spoke of love,
Should I not answer from my throne,
Have pity on me, ye my friends,
For I have heard the sound thereof.
Should I not turn with yearning eyes,
Turn earthwards with a pitiful pang?
Oh save me from a pang in heaven!

Even in heaven, the speaker's knowledge of profane indulgence colours her estimation of divine permanence. This is the problem central to 'The Convent Threshold' and characteristic of the majority of Rossetti's early devotional poetry. It is, as ever, the problem of how to establish a coherent, centered world-view when elements of the perspective deconstruct the principles upon which that coherence relies - the field of enquiry explored by all Rossetti's poetry as interpreted in this thesis. The insidious pervasiveness (reaching even to the divine beyond) of the extra-religious experiences which the speaker of 'The Convent Threshold' describes stands in opposition to the divine permanence the

poem sets out to assert and justify. Through her pious meditations, Rossetti seeks to renounce the world and its ways, but only ends up despairingly acknowledging the potency of earthly passions. By this point in 'The Convent Threshold', the speaker is as much trying to convince *herself* of the validity of that which she is proposing, as much as any absent lover superficially addressed. The two dream visions which follow in the poem further impress upon the narrative the unhinged state of the speaker's resolve and magnify her own feeling of isolation from certitude. The foray into the sphere of dreams is notable in itself (see chapter 2) in its indication of the need for relativity of interpretation of the matters at hand, simultaneously an escape from the causal debate elsewhere in the poem yet an advance into a new frame of reference with which to express the argument. In themselves, the dream interludes are attempts to develop symbolically the theme of guilt and repentance which the speaker pursued at the start of the monologue; however, taken in context of the tense, unresolved debate which directly precedes them, the dreams take on a fresh, less comfortably assimilated resonance. The first vision casts together a Miltonic atmosphere with a dramatic script redolent of parts of Keats' *Hyperion* to create an oddly wooden, staged vignette;

I tell you what I dreamed last night.
A spirit with transfigured face
Fire-footed clomb an infinite space.
I heard his hundred pinions clang,
Heaven-bells rejoicing rang and rang,
Heaven air was filled with subtle scents,
Worlds spun upon their rushing cars
He mounted shrieking 'Give me light!'
Still light was poured on him, more light;
Angels, Archangels he outstripped,
Exultant in exceeding might,
And trod the skirts of Cherubim.

Still 'Give me light' he shrieked; and dipped
His thirsty face, and drank a sea,
Athirst with thirst it could not slake.
I saw him, drunk with knowledge, take
From aching brows the aureole crown -
His locks writhe like a cloven snake -
He left his throne to grovel down
And lick the dust of Seraphs' feet...

This dream tells of a selfishly motivated figure's Faustian progress from unquenchable desire for knowledge, through surfeit of that knowledge, to the humble realisation of the error of his materialistic ways (20). The epistemological quest, in the dream vision, is presented as a blustering, melodramatic process in imagery rather overblown and contrived - making Rossetti's concluding moral somewhat inappropriate to the terms of the dramatic preface;

For what is knowledge duly weighed?
Knowledge is strong, but love is sweet;
Yea all the progress he had made
Was to learn that all is small
Save love, for love is all in all.

These sententiae, like the concluding lines of *Goblin Market*, have an oddly unsatisfying air about them. The charge does not quite hold. For a start, the whole scenario is presented (in a poem thus far unresolved) without debate; in a self-contained, unchallenged lesson the ecclesiastical, pat maxims are illustrated (rather than 'duly weighed') in self-justificatory, pseudo-Christian terms - hardly, therefore, a stretching of meaningful parameters. In fact, the whole vision and moral might be taken as a neat parody of Christina Rossetti's stipulated aim in 'The Convent Threshold', i.e. to justify *from experience* the path of

repentance as a route to spiritual recovery. The speaker is patently on shaky ground, needing to resort to a predictable hellfire sermon in the hope of redeeming the argument she herself had emotionally deconstructed some few lines earlier. As if to apologise for the hectoring, neo-scriptural doctrine of the first dream vision, the speaker checks herself and returns to the exact same phrase - 'I tell you what I dreamed last night...' - which began the unconvincing sermon. A new dream is narrated, and its more sincere, personal tone admits of the vulnerability which the episode of the fire-footed spirit has pretended to overcome. The setting is the speaker's grave and the language of the poem - firstly Biblical, secondly sermonic - becomes immediately subdued and simple, wistful and plain. The tone shifts from the hollow ceremonial to the sincerely confessional.

I tell you what I dreamed last night.
It was not dark, it was not light,
Cold dews had drenched my plenteous hair
Through clay; you came to see me there,
And 'Do you dream of me?' you said.
My heart was dust that used to leap
To you; I answered half asleep:
'My pillow s damp, my sheets are red,
There's a leaden tester to my bed:
Find you a warmer playfellow,
A warmer pillow for your head,
A kinder love to love than mine.'
You wrung your hands: while I, like lead,
Crushed downwards through the sodden earth:
You smote your hands but not in mirth,
And reeled but were not drunk with wine.

This eschatological vision candidly admits of the dichotomy - earthly and divine - which the major debate of 'The Convent Threshold' had found so unsettling and which the previous dream vision had attempted

(unsuccessfully) to negate. The essential, projected unity sought by the speaker of the poem in the afterlife cannot, in the work's specified terms of current separation, but be a qualified, partial state - therefore a non-unified order. In a manner akin to that evinced by *Monna Innominata*, this text - again by an intertextual process - has promoted potential order only to disqualify the notion in retrospect. This sense of partial realisation of the divinely inspired goal prevails by reason of the inevitable placement of the holy vision in the secular context - in context of the speaker's qualifying earthly experience. Knowledge of divine permanence is drawn from, but also *deconstructed* by experience of earthly mutability. The speaker finally confesses to that which the work's argument has strongly prefigured - she is a self-sentenced outsider in terms of the heavenly vision of harmony offered at the start of the poem. Symbolically, the poem is uneasy with the religious platitudes it began by attempting to substantiate. The 'you' representing unrepentant, profane values, has become the integral element without which the speaker cannot decipher the world. Stripped of the desire to preach religious doctrine, the broken subject is left with a moving, vulnerable sense of her own state of trapped irresolution;

For all night long I dreamed of you:
I woke and prayed against my will,
Then slept to dream of you again.
At length I rose and knelt and prayed.
I cannot write the words I said,
My words were slow, my tears were few;
But through the dark my silence spoke
Like thunder.

These marvellously simple dualisms - 'woke/slept', 'rose/knelt', 'silence/thunder' - acutely enact the wavering sensibility and lack of firm belief at the heart of the poetry. 'I... prayed against my will', 'I cannot write the words I said...' - like the shorter devotional lyrics examined earlier, 'The Convent Threshold' repeatedly, painfully exhibits a failure to resolve its constituent ideologies. The 'silence' which speaks 'like thunder' is the woefully extracted admittance that the religious faith the work set out to articulate has not been comfortably accepted by the speaker. The tension in Rossetti's best devotional poetry arises from its internal questioning of the devotion it purports to advertise. Superficially embracing pious conventions, poems like 'The Convent Threshold' display the active interrogation of inherited ideology detected in the poet's secular writings examined previously in this study. As with *Monna Innominata*, the early religious pieces only achieve stability and a place of (spiritually affirmed) harmony when the questioning stops - in 'silence'. The speaker of 'The Convent Threshold', by means of her own mistrust of dogma, has manoeuvred herself, literally and symbolically, into a pose of acceptance, 'frozen... stifling in my struggle I lay.' This position reached, the tension concludes and the Paradisal vision may reassert itself uninterrupted by recontextualisation or scepticism.

If now you saw me you would say:
Where is the face I used to love?
And I would answer: Gone before;
It tarries veiled in Paradise.
When once the morning star shall rise,
When earth with shadow flees away
And we stand safe within the door,
Then you shall lift the veil thereof.
Look up, rise up: for far above
Our palms are grown, our place is set;

There we shall meet as once we met
And love with the old familiar love.

Wearied of argument and the ceaselessly instable state it generates, the speaker, and the poetry, has reached a position of self-imposed passivity, 'safe within the door', a retreat from the flux and tension of debate, which facilitates acceptance of the holy writ and (at a textual, literary level) explains the unflinching production of exegetical religious writing by Christina Rossetti in her final years. For the agnostical heroine of *Muade*, stable resolution could only come with death; for Christina Rossetti, it comes with the death of the questioning impulse. Muade Foster shrank from committing the sin of blasphemy;

'... No: at least I will not
profane Holy Things; I will not add this to all
the rest. I have gone over and over again,
thinking I should come right in time, and I do
not come right. I will go no more... (21)

Change the final phrase to 'I will *question* no more...', and the above statement could adequately preface Christina Rossetti's excursion into purely exegetical writing during the latter stages of her career. The self-conscious assuaging of the formerly avid desire to recontextualise or deconstruct instances of holy ordination underpins Rossetti's late writings with stolid consistency. The Bible is no longer one of several ideological codes to be investigated; it becomes, literally, gospel *truth*. With the movement into unflinchingly pious exposition, no longer skirted nor prefaced by the unsettling tensions we have seen in earlier pieces, Rossetti finally attains that singularity of conviction she had so

openly envied in formative pieces like 'After This The Judgement' (*Works*, pp. 188-90), written in 1856.

As eager homebound traveller to the goal,
Or steadfast seeker on an unsearched main,
Or martyr panting for an aureole,
My fellow pilgrims pass me, and attain
That hidden mansion of perpetual peace
Where keen desire and hope dwell free from pain.

Though, as we have seen, it is always the ultimate goal sought by the speakers of Christina Rossetti's early devotional poetry, divine salvation, conventionally imaged here as that cherished 'hidden mansion of perpetual peace', is never an absolute certainty. In the religious writings composed prior to the mid-1870s, doubt inhabits the verse like an unwelcome but magnetic guest at a solemn prayer meeting. Poems such as 'The Convent Threshold' and 'A Chilly Night' show that Rossetti is as prone as any Victorian writer to the disappearance of God - her fertile intellect repeatedly leaves the 'steadfast seeker' unsure and questioning, whilst 'fellow pilgrims pass' by on the route to certitude. In her late writings, however, all this changes. By a self-imposed blinkering process, Rossetti makes sure that the divine presence never leaves her line of vision; by a chastened resistance of the questioning impulse, the later exegetical productions allow no recontextualisation or interrogation of the Biblical dogma they closely re-narrate. In place of the exciting disruption of certitude of yore, Rossetti's mature pious writing exhibits a smug complacency in its regurgitative embrace of Christian cliché which is, at best, dull and, at worst, offensive. The poet who spent the first three quarters of her career articulating the

dynamics of a decentred logos occupies her final years in praise of the newly centred vision she has unflinchingly adopted. The later Christina Rossetti self-consciously inhabits the pose she had envied herself (whilst still 'panting for an aureole') in the sonnet 'In Progress' (*Works*, p. 352);

Ten years ago it seemed impossible
That she should ever grow so calm as this,
With self-remembrance in her warmest kiss
And dim dried eyes like an exhausted well.
Slow-speaking when she has some fact to tell,
Silent with long-unbroken silences,
Centred in self yet not unpleased to please,
Gravely monotonous like a passing bell...
... Sometimes I fancy we may one day see
Her head shoot forth seven stars from where they lurk
And her eyes lightnings and her shoulders wings.

This poem captures excellently the feeling one gets when reading Christina Rossetti's liturgical pronouncements of the 1880's and after, and comparing their lazy platitudes with the pained tensions of her earlier works. The late work consistently reveals (or rather, boasts) a mind firmly 'Centred in self' and 'not unpleased' with that state; unfortunately, the literature which this state encourages is, indeed, 'Gravely monotonous like a passing bell.' The late, pious writings come across as tired and stolid simply because they offer scriptural policy pat and unprefaced by question - Christian ideology is not checked and made to justify itself any more and, as a result, the poetry and prose assumes the hollow dryness of an 'exhausted well'. The timbre of the latterday exegetical writing is such that, lyric to lyric, sentiment and style are interchangeable; it is instructive, however, to examine a couple of pieces which illustrate the general approach, before turning to

a late prose work which openly expresses the orthodox philosophy, oppositional to that inscribed in all her previous works, Christina Rossetti settled upon in the final years of her life.

The Bible has rightly been recognised as 'the principal textual influence' upon Christina Rossetti's generically eclectic and intertextually realised poetry (22). In the late poetry and prose, the Bible becomes the exclusive influential source, no longer recontextualised alongside mediaeval, Petrarchan and Dantean, and Victorian ideologies but offered as a sole authority without question. William Michael Rossetti comments on this regurgitative tendency in the heavily devotional poetry;

The reader of Christina Rossetti's poems will be apt to say that there is an unceasing use of biblical diction. This is a fact; and to some minds it may appear to detract seriously from her claims to originality, or to personal merit of execution. Without pre-judging this question, I will only remark that the Bible was so much her rule of life and of faith that it had almost become a part of herself, and she uttered herself accordingly. (23)

In an uncharacteristically lighthearted vein, William Michael goes on to propose that, if all the passages 'dependent upon what can be found in the Bible' were excised from his sister's writings, then her collected works would be 'reduced to something approaching a vacuum.' This would not be true of Christina Rossetti's earlier verse - the questioning of theological absolutes would remain - but the notion would pertain if the later poetry were the subject of the experiment. Elsewhere, William Michael refers to Christina's pious belief as relayed in the poems as an

'ardent absorbing devotion' (*Works*, p. ix) - a remark which neatly captures the sense of utter subsumption of self-expression into the structures of holy, Biblical writ which one repeatedly encounters in Christina Rossetti's later writing. The prefatory 'Key to My Book' pages of the prose exegetical tract, *Called To Be Saints* (1881), turned down by Macmillan in 1876 and finally published by the S. P. C. K., Rossetti boldly and officially relinquishes any claim to artistic spontaneity;

No graver slur could attach to my book
than would be a reputation for prevalent
originality. (24)

Similarly, in a late poem typical of this pious subjugation of inspirational energies, 'For Thine Own Sake, O My God' (*Works*, p. 252), the poet turns her back on the past and openly confesses her chosen path, a route strictly adhered to by her later writings;

Wearied of sinning, wearied of repentance,
Wearied of self, I turn, my God, to Thee...

'Wearied I loathe myself,' admits the speaker of this short confessional piece, before wholly surrendering her will to the divine omnipresence, 'Thee who art my maker...' In the sixty-nine consecutive poems which make up the 'Some Feast And Fasts' series in the *Works* (pp. 156-80), mostly composed between 1877 and 1893, Rossetti recites the holy days in poetry remarkable for its lack of energy and its forced tones of reverence. Many of these poems are prefaced by epigrammatical Biblical quotations which the particular poem proceeds to echo, more often than

not in a fashion which adds little to the import of the actual Biblical phrase and which, certainly, does not question the scripture or interpret it in any productive manner. Unlike the Dantean and Petrarchan epigrams employed in the course of the *Monna Innominata* cycle, there is nothing innovative or subversive about Rossetti's Biblical citations. The sixteen-line commentary, 'Good Friday Morning' (*Works*, pp. 166-7), written in 1893, a year before Rossetti's death, is typical of the approach manifested in the later pious work. Its scriptural epigram is simply 'Bearing His Cross';

Up Thy Hill of sorrows
Thou all alone,
Jesus, man's Redeemer,
Climbing to a Throne:
Thro' the world triumphant,
Thro' the Church in pain,
Which think to look upon Thee,
No more again.

Upon my hill of sorrows
I, Lord, with Thee,
Cheered, upheld, yea carried
If a need should be:
Cheered, upheld, yea carried,
Never left alone,
Carried in thy heart of hearts
To a throne.

The most striking aspect of this unchallenging exposition of Christian belief is the speaker's relinquishment of an active subjectivity in the second stanza, to place the point of origin of the poem (literally) from within the divine manifestation - 'I, Lord, with Thee/... in thy heart'. The overwhelming tone of the poem - even in the face of Christ's suffering - is one of positive affirmation, with the speaker's repeated assertion of comfortability, 'Cheered, upheld, yea carried...', removing

any sense of strain or doubt from the piece. Unlike Rossetti's earlier theological monologues, 'Good Friday Morning' is neither a quest poem - the speaker is 'Carried.../To a throne' she is certain of reaching - nor an articulation of separation - the subject rejoices in being 'Never left alone.' The bipartite structure of the piece, used in those former lyrics to juxtapose faith and scepticism, is now used as a consolidatory measure; the second stanza is used merely to repeat, in an unimaginative and prissy manner, the patterning of the first, sitting the speaker's contented embrace of the holy route to salvation atop the symbolic structure established in the opening octave. As the speaker is passively 'Carried' along supported by the divine presence, so the poem proceeds passively, and without question, from the perspective of blissful certitude. 'Ascension Eve' (*Works*, p. 169), from the same period, forms an even more open celebration of the newfound ability to live one's existence through the channels of divinely inspired order. The speaker of 'Good Friday Morning' rejoiced in being 'Cheered, upheld, yea carried', sentiments directly echoed by the 'beautified, replenished, comforted' state described in 'Ascension Eve'.

Lord, Thou art Love, fill us with charity.
O Thou the Life of living and of dead,
Who givest more the more Thyself hast given,
Suffice us as Thy saints Thou hast sufficed;
That beautified, replenished, comforted,
Still gazing off from earth and up at heaven,
We may pursue Thy steps, Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, the desire is to 'pursue' the path of Christian discipline to a stable, centred position which is never held to be in doubt. Saturated with Biblical register, the speaker's suppliant, reverential tone

throughout emphasises the prayer-like quality of this piece - its tone a great deal removed from the interrogative examination of pious platitudes performed in the poet's earlier religious work. 'We know the way', insists another poem of the 'Feasts And Fasts' series ('Easter Tuesday', *Works*, p. 169), 'thank God Who hath showed us the way', and the poetry of this period brims with a self-satisfied confidence in the authority of the Biblical dogma it invokes in a plethora of colourless, archaic diction. The 'beautiful Paradise' which was so eagerly questioned as an ideal in previous writings is now happily accepted as an absolute truth. The Christian deity is repeatedly set forth as an unshakeable principle of intelligibility, not now to be deconstructed nor tested by context, granting enduring stability to the logos thereby generated. A verse from 'The World. Self Destruction', a series like 'Feasts And Fasts' published in the 1893 *Verses* collection, plainly emphasises the all-pervasive nature of this newly accepted, unchallengeable centering principle;

O Lord, seek us, O Lord, find us
In thy patient care;
Be Thy Love before, behind us,
Round us, everywhere:
Lest the god of this world blind us,
Lest he speak us fair,
Lest he forge a chain to bind us,
Lest he bait a snare.
Turn not from us, call to mind us,
Find, embrace us, bear;
Be Thy Love before, behind us,
Round us, everywhere.

Once more in rhythms and diction incantatory and prayer-like, the speaker celebrates her newfound sense of order and harmony in terms

which, by repetition, emphasise its pervasive stability - the guarantee of salvation that is 'before, behind us,/Round us, everywhere', in contrast to the unstable orders articulated in the secular poetry, with their incoherence and inherent inconsistencies. Beneath the auspices of the divinely ordered system Rossetti now gladly inhabits, ideological notions which, before, would have been open to objection (or at least would have their inconsistencies highlighted) are allowed to pass unchallenged. A striking example may be witnessed in 'A Helpmeet For Him' (*Works*, p. 415), a short poem of 1891, where the 'woman is a helpmeet for man' maxim, knowingly recontextualised to some effect in *Monna Innominata*, is now offered without a hint of irony.

Woman was made for man's delight;
Charm, O woman, be not afraid!
His shadow by day, his moon by night,
Woman was made.

The once subverted patriarchal code is now accepted, since the ordination is one born of a greater patriarchy, that of God's writ. It can be seen from instances such as this that the singular, orthodox Christian ideology expounded in the later devotional verses of Christina Rossetti is oppositional to the collision of perspectives, pious and profane, effected in the work examined in previous chapters of this study.

Christina Rossetti's devotional poetry of the 1880s and 1890s openly assumes the thematic uniformity and complacent assimilation of dogma which her earlier writing had so stringently resisted. The tone (and

often the content) is interchangeable from poem to poem and the examples analysed above are by no means the most suppliant in manner, nor the most purely exegetical in approach. For a systematically expressed, and final glimpse of the ideological position ultimately adopted by Christina Rossetti, it is instructive to consider the last original work the authoress published in her lifetime, *The Face of the Deep, a Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892). (*Verses* (1893) was a collection of poems previously available in S. P. C. K. prose devotional works.) This prose volume, containing a large selection of short religious poems previously unpublished, is a close, textual study of the *Book of Revelation* which Rossetti had been at work upon for six years - the period leading up to the ominous diagnosis of cancer in her chest and shoulder. Like all her prose productions, *The Face of the Deep*, published again by the S. P. C. K., is solidly written and not without moments of engagingly perceptive insight, and yet the very solidity of its generally sombre prose reminds us once more that it is in the area of lyric verse that Rossetti's real talent as a writer always lay. What is most notable in this last authorial statement is the unswerving adherence to the principles set forth by the orthodox Christian philosophy upon which Rossetti sets out to comment. A tone of over-acted, self-satisfied sincerity pervades the work's languid illustration of Biblical dogma, as the fragmented, painfully unstable world view Christina Rossetti had continually met in her intellectual quest for Unity and certitude is neatly reconciled within the terms of her newly embraced religious vision.

Multitude no less than Unity characterises
various types of God the Holy Spirit. Water indefinitely

divisible, and every portion equivalent in completeness to the whole. Fire kindling unlimited flames, each in like manner complete in itself. Dew made up of innumerable drops: so also rain, and if we may make the distinction, showers. A cloud as a cloud is one, while as raindrops it is a multitude. And as in division each portion is a complete whole devoid of parts, so equally in reunion all portions together form one complete whole similarly devoid of parts: let drops or let flames run together, and there exists no distinction of parts in their uniform volume. (25)

How far removed from the subtle deconstructions of stability performed in Rossetti's earlier writings, both secular and devotional, is this laboured, almost risibly stilted attempt at justification of fragmentation within. Gone, lost forever, is the challenging tension of *Monna Innominata* in favour of this rather naive, pantheistic prosody - more suited to a Sunday School sermon for infants than a mature ontological reflection. It is incredibly disappointing, again and again, to witness the smug assimilation of dogma unquestioned in the work of a writer capable, as we have seen, of such remarkably incisive interrogation of absolutist complacency. The notion of immutability, so painfully recontextualised in previous works, is finally embraced here as Rossetti contentedly echoes the import of *Revelation* 22, xiii;

13. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

Thus is it at the beginning... and still thus at the end; thus at the first, and still thus at the last. We change, He changes not. Yet even in ourselves constitutional changeableness cannot annul a certain inherent unchangeableness, which in so far corresponds with His in whom we live and move and have our being: for we are His offspring. His Immutability is reflected in our identity: as He cannot deny Himself, so neither can we deny ourselves. Rocks may fall on us, mountains

cover us; but under mountain and rock remains
the inextinguishable I. (26)

The 'inextinguishable I' marks the achievement, before inconceivable, of a position of ultimate stability within the self from which the Rossetti subjectivity, as expressed in literature, may now proceed. 'His immutability is reflected in our identity' - there exists no firm precedent for this manner of statement, framed in affirmatory tones, in the earlier poetry, devotional or otherwise, of Christina Rossetti. That sense of strain, the tense impact of doubt so valuable to the generation of varying perspectives in Rossetti's earlier work, is now no longer a threat to a certitude which, whatever counter-arguments come along, 'remains... inextinguishable.' Orthodox Christian dictates are now accepted without reservation. When commenting upon her own poetry, symbolically from within the text or in prefatory pieces such as that introducing *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti was formerly keen to pull ideologies apart and illustrate ironies and contradictions. To do so in this Biblical commentary would now constitute blasphemy and so Christina Rossetti's critique (or, rather, exposition) of God's law becomes mere regurgitation of platitudes, repetitive and unquestioning, wholly at odds with the strategy of all her best work. *The Face of the Deep* exudes an atmosphere of humble passivity, directly antithetical to the position which the speaker of *Monna Innominata* struggled to occupy.

Only should I have readers, let me remind
them that what I write professes to be a *surface*
study of an unfathomable depth: if it incites any
to dive deeper than I attain to, it will so far have
accomplished a worthy work. (27)

By the time of this lengthy study, Rossetti's poetry and prose is little more than a mouthpiece reciting pious platitudes in a way which makes for dull reading indeed. In the course of her prissy illustrations of Biblical doctrine, Rossetti's speaker boldly states what 'must be understood literally' and what 'seems figurative' with a confidence born of outright acceptance of one, consummate reading of a text which goes against the explicit advocacy of pluralism recommended by her own earlier poetry. Absolutely no doubt remains; the speaker openly admits herself to be 'convinced';

What then do I think? God helping me,
I will think this. the Divine Call has been
addressed to me, has reached me, has urged my
will, convinced my understanding, moved my
heart...

... I observe moreover that my call being a
practical one, demanding not intellect on my
side but obedience, enjoins practice rather
than subtil theory, and is responded to by
simplest obedience. My understanding breaks
down: so be it. Please God, my will shall not
break down, nor my faith make me shipwreck.
O Love of Christ, constrain me, constrain
all.

(28)

'My understanding breaks down: so be it', confesses the speaker as 'practice' of 'obedience' is now preferred to the 'intellect' and 'subtil theory' which characterises Christina Rossetti's finest writings. Repeatedly turning to archaic, liturgical diction - 'O Love of Christ...' - the text consistently invokes a position of utter subordination to the Christian cause. As the speaker look to the Day of Judgement, we witness the resigned attempt to rationalise her own relinquishment of

intellectual inquisitiveness; by repetition, typically, Rossetti convinces herself of the righteousness of the place at which she has arrived;

Some can meditate and interpret. All can
meditate and pray.
To interpret should do good. To pray will do good.
Interpretation may err and darken knowledge. Prayer
fetches down wisdom from the Father of Lights.
Prayer is the safeguard of interpretation, and
without interpretation is still profitable...
Interpretation is safe and seemly for some. Prayer
is safe and seemly for all. (29)

With these unreservedly suppliant, pious sentiments, Christina Rossetti chooses to close her literary career, as she did her actual life, in a state of rote, unquestioning prayer (30). There is an oddly tragic irony in all of this. Not only did Christina Rossetti's submissive acceptance of an orthodox faith remove those invigorating, restless tensions which make her finest poetry so compelling and forward-looking; her religion, according to her brother William Michael, 'weighed her down at the last.'

Not that she died despairing - very far from
that: but she died with a more imminent sense
of unworthiness and apprehension than of acceptance
and unshakeable confiding hope. (31)

Through unquestioning, finally blinkered 'acceptance' of one ideology above all others, Christina Rossetti endeavoured, self-consciously, to construct in art that 'unshakeable' stability which her most rewarding poetry had identified as an unattainable goal on earth. Superficially, and unremittingly, the later devotional texts, both poetry and prose, convey the blissful achievement of a settled, unified position; as to

just how much doubt these seemingly watertight and affirmed works conceal, we may only guess.

Christina Rossetti's greatest poetry is that which strives to adopt the conventional Christian position but finds that pose, once tried out, an awkward fit, uncomfortable in its suggestion of intellectual inertia and implicit resolution of alternatives. Poems such as *Goblin Market* and *the Prince's Progress* show her capable of sustaining the acutely managed lexical artistry, present in her shortest lyrics, and turning that artistry toward a definite purpose - the redirection of literary tradition. But it is when that peculiarly inventive linguistic vision is directed towards matters of belief and faith that Rossetti's writing exudes a passionate self-awareness that is at once inspiring and, ultimately, painful. The turning towards God at the close of *Monna Innominata* tells us about the poet's own pious declarations at the end of her career not because scriptural doctrine is warmly embraced, but because it results from a compromised state and has a hollow ring to it, with regard to the clamorous questioning of absolutes that has gone before. Thematically, *Monna Innominata* attempted to follow the set pattern established in many of Christina Rossetti's lyrics - construction of a perspective, gentle interrogation of that position, stability disturbed to the point of irresolution, a kind of relocated resolve coloured in the devotional works by orthodox Christian hopes of redemption in the afterlife. But, through reason of her sex, her place in society, her poetic vocation, Christina Rossetti's hope is (to use a favourite Biblical phrase of her own, originating in *Proverbs* 13, xii) forever 'hope deferred' - hope removed one step, conveying an air of

unquiet at taking the pledge, at accepting redemption (or any ideological position) without being allowed the grace to question that hope. Had Christina Rossetti never adopted the stance of unfailing pious humility effected in her late writing, she may conceivably have produced even finer work in her mature years than that which she composed earlier in her career. We will never know. But, certainly, it is the fine interplay between faith and doubt which motivates Christina Rossetti's most affecting writing. The two interact to create a fascinating, compelling tension that is marvellously suited to expression through the delicately poised lexical style she had developed in her secular work. Through being forced (by her own conscience) to justify and come to terms with her self-imposed pious viewpoint, Rossetti's earlier devotional writing shows a mind unafraid to question ideas of 'truth' and a poetic artistry consistently capable of maintaining that sharp, engaging sense of tension which underlies all her strongest work. Harrison has remarked upon 'how the earnest repressiveness of the Victorians could ultimately explode into the sensual extravagance of the decadents' (32). With Christina Rossetti herself there was no explosion; in fact, quite the opposite. The tensions in her early poems build up to a spectacular and sudden (but silenced) implosion of passion and emotion, simultaneously marking the relinquishment of worldly extravagance (poetry being the aesthetic representation of this) and the oppositional adoption of an ascetic, conventionally pious, ordered existence. Only in *Goblin Market* had Rossetti's verbal manner been unfettered and luxuriant (and only then, half-vicariously so, via the mouthpiece of the 'goblin men'): elsewhere it is controlled and free from ornament, capable of great moments of insight but never ostentatious about it. With the late

devotional writing, the reserved lexical style no longer stretches a tense surface over a welling intellectual vision beneath, but mirrors a flat, unvarying and ascetically pious content. From her earliest lyrics to the last prose exegetical pieces, we witness Christina Rossetti's aesthetic vision gradually being checked and brought into line with the orthodox Christian outlook which always governed her outward, physical existence. The religion which had always underpinned her poetic vision was eventually to stifle it, but, throughout this progression, poetry for Rossetti was essentially cathartic. Through her writing, female identity and the place of women is scrutinised, re-addressed and ultimately, on a personal level, offered up to God for redemption in an eternal afterlife. The intellectually provocative subtext of Christina Rossetti's best poems, the refusal complacently to accept what might just as easily be questioned, hints at the sense of strain which must have occupied her mind in its ultimate, self-imposed embrace of orthodox piety, and all that such piety entailed for her art.

NOTES

1) Rossetti, Christina G., *Time Flies, A Reading Diary* (London: S. P. C. K., 1885) p. 210

2) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *Family Letters* p. 99

3) McGann, Jerome J., 'The Religious Poetry Of Christina Rossetti', *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983), pp. 127-44, quotation p. 127

4) Kohl, James A., 'A Medical Comment On Christina Rossetti', *Notes And Queries* CCXIII November 1968, pp. 423-4

5) In 1873, when her sister Maria became a nun, Christina herself showed interest in the conventual vocation, associating herself with the Park Village Sisterhood, Albany Street (Maria joined the Anglican Sisterhood

Of Saints, Margaret Street). Christina did some work for the linked Park Village organisation, the Young Woman's Friendly Society, which sought to aid poor women of the parish, but preferred to explore the conventual pathway in her verse rather than in her life. 'I might have been a hermit, but not a nun', Christina is reported to have told her niece, Olive Rossetti. See Packer, *Christina Rossetti* pp. 55, 304.

6) Rossetti, W. M. ed., *Family Letters* p. 103

7) The profane and pious divide is reflected in the arrangement of Christina Rossetti's published poems, up until 1893, into specifically 'Pre-Raphaelite' and 'Devotional' sections in each Macmillan volume. *Verses* (London; S. P. C. K., 1893) collected all the hitherto available 'Devotional' pieces into a single volume. From 1879, with the publication of *Seek And Find*, Christina's collections of heavily exegetical poetry and Biblical prose commentary were all published by the S. P. C. K. (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge).

8) Evans, Ifor, *English Poetry In The Later Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1933) p. 67

9) Waller, R. D., *The Rossetti Family 1824-54* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1932) p. 219

10) Rossetti, Christina G., *Maude, A Story For Girls* (London: J. Bowden, 1897)

11) *Ibid* pp. 6-8

12) *Ibid* pp. vii-ix

13) *Ibid* p. 4

14) *Ibid* p. 29

15) *Ibid* p. 36

16) *Ibid* pp. 5-6

17) Hill, R. W. ed., *Tennyson's Poetry* p. 52

18) Rossetti, W. M., 'Preface' to *Poems Of Christina Rossetti* Chosen and edited by W. M. Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904) p. ix

19) Packer, *Christina Rossetti* p. 72

20) Packer, in *Christina Rossetti* p. 129, unsurprisingly, but altogether rather quaintly, proposes that the shrieking, fire-footed 'kingly' one represents William Bell Scott (no longer of the 'soft-rounded cheeks', one presumes), offering as sole evidence the fact that

... his ermine cloak was woven from a synthetic fabric of Christina's invention, and ... it was she who bestowed it upon him.

- 21) Rossetti, Christina G., *Maude* p. 54
- 22) Jiminez, N., *The Bible and the Poetry of Christina Rossetti: A Concordance* (London: Greenwood Press, 1979) p. 1
- 23) Rossetti, W. M., 'Preface' to *Poems of Christina Rossetti* p. xii
- 24) Rossetti, Christina G., *Called To Be Saints; the Minor Festivals devotionally studied* (London; S. P. C. K., 1881) p. xvii
- 25) Rossetti, Christina G., *The Face of the Deep* (London; S. P. C. K., 1892) p. 15
- 26) *Ibid*, p. 156
- 27) *Ibid*, p. 365
- 28) *Ibid*, p. 547
- 29) *Ibid*, pp. 548-9
- 30) Rossetti, W. M., *Some Reminiscences* (London; Brown, Langham and Co., 1906) 2 vols. II, p. 533
- 31) *Ibid*, II, p. 534
- 32) Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* p. 187

And now, more high than the vision of souls may climb,
The soul whose song was as music of stars that chime,
Clothed round with life as of dawn and the mounting sun,
Sings, and we know not here of the song sublime.

(Swinburne, from 'A New Year's Eve; Christina Rossetti Died
December 29, 1894', written two days after Christina Rossetti's death.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. PRIMARY SOURCES

Works by Christina G. Rossetti

Poetry

Verses by Christina G. Rossetti Privately printed (London; 1847)

Goblin Market, and Other Poems (London; Macmillan, 1862)

The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems (London; Macmillan, 1866)

Sing-Song, a Nursery Rhyme Book (London; F. S. Ellis, 1872)

Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems New Edition (London; Macmillan, 1875)

A Pageant, and Other Poems (London; Macmillan, 1881)

Verses Reprinted from Called To Be Saints, Time Flies, and The Face of the Deep (London; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1893)

New Poems, by Christina Rossetti hitherto unpublished or uncollected ed. William Michael Rossetti (London; Macmillan, 1896)

The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes ed. W. M. Rossetti (London; Macmillan, 1904)

Poems of Christina Rossetti Chosen and edited with a 'Preface' by W. M. Rossetti (London; Macmillan, 1904)

The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti ed. Rebecca W. Crump (Baton Rouge; Louisiana University Press, 1979-) 2 vols. to date

Prose

'Dante, an English Classic' in *Churchman's Shilling Magazine* Vol. II (1867), pp. 200-5

Commonplace and Other Short Stories (London; F. S. Ellis, 1870)

Annus Domini, a prayer for each day of the year, founded on a text of Holy Scripture (London; S. P. C. K., 1874)

Speaking Likenesses (London; Macmillan, 1874)

Seek and Find A double series of short studies of the Benedicite (London; S. P. C. K., 1879)

Called to be Saints: the Minor Festivals devotionally studied (London; S. P. C. K., 1881)

Letter and Spirit Notes on the Commandments (London; S. P. C. K., 1883)

'Dante. The Poet Illustrated out of the Poem' in *The Century* Vol. XXVII (Feb. 1884) pp. 566-73

Time Flies, A Reading Diary (London; S. P. C. K., 1885)

The Face of the Deep: a devotional commentary on the Apocalypse (London; S. P. C. K., (1892)

Maude, A Story for Girls (London; J. Bowden, 1897)

2. SECONDARY SOURCES

Biographical and critical studies specifically dealing with Christina Rossetti and/or works containing published correspondence

Barrick, Jean A., *The Authority of Childhood: Three Components of the Childlike Spirit in Poems by Robert Louis Stevenson, Kate Greenaway and Christina Rossetti* (Michigan; Ann Arbor, 1971)

Battiscombe, Georgina, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (London; Constable, 1981)

Bell, Mackenzie, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London; Thos. Burleigh, 1898)

Bellas, Ralph, *Christina Rossetti* (Boston; Twayne, 1977)

Bentley, D. M. R., 'The Meretricious and the Meritorious in *Goblin Market*: A Conjecture and an Analysis' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 57-81

Brzenk, E. J., 'Up-Hill' and 'Down-' in *Victorian Poetry* 10 (1972) p. 367

Bump, Jerome, 'Hopkins, Christina Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism' in *Victorian Newsletter* 57 (1980) pp. 1-6

-----, 'Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 322-45

Cantalupo, Catherine M., 'Christina Rossetti the Devotional Poet and the Rejection of Romantic Nature' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 274-300

Connor, Stephen, 'Speaking Likenesses: Language and Repetition in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*' in *Victorian Poetry* 22 (1984) pp. 439-48

- Crump, Rebecca W., 'Eighteen Moments' Monuments' in Fraser, R. S., ed., *Essays on the Rossettis* pp. 210-29
- , *Christina Rossetti - A Reference Guide* (Boston; G. K. Hall, 1976)
- Curran, Stuart, 'The Lyric Voice of Christina Rossetti' in *Victorian Poetry* 9 (1971) pp. 287-99
- D'Amico, Diane, 'Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems' in *Victorian Poetry* 19 (1981) pp. 117-38
- , 'Reading and Rereading George Herbert and Christina Rossetti' in *John Donne Journal* 4 (1985) 269-89
- , 'Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene: Christina Rossetti's Triptych' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 175-191
- Dombrowski, T., 'Dualism in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti' in *Victorian Poetry* 14 (1976) pp. 70-6
- Evans, B. Ifor, 'The Sources of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*' in *Modern Language Review* 28 (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1933) pp. 156-65
- Fass, Barbara, 'Christina Rossetti and "St. Agnes Eve"' in *Victorian Poetry* 14 (1976) pp. 33-46
- Flowers, Betty S., 'The Kingly Self: Rossetti as Woman Artist' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 159-74
- Fredeman, William E., 'Christina Rossetti' in Faverty, F. E., ed., *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1956) pp. 284-93
- , 'Review' of *Christina Rossetti* by Lona M. Packer and *Rossetti-Macmillan Letters* ed. Packer, in *Victorian Studies* VIII, Sept. 1964 (Indiana; Indiana University Press 1964) pp. 71-7
- Going, William, '*Goblin Market* and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' in *Pre-Raphaelite Review* III (1980) pp. 54-62
- Goldberg, Gail Lynn, 'Dante Gabriel's "Revising Hand": His Illustrations for Christina Rossetti's Poems' in *Victorian Poetry* 20 (1982) pp. 145-59
- Gosse, Edmund, 'Christina Rossetti' in *The Century* Vol. XLVI (June 1893) pp. 211-7
- Harrison, Antony H., *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Sussex; Harvester, 1988)
- , '18 Early Letters by Christina Rossetti' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 192-207

Homans, Margaret, 'Syllables of Velvet: Dickinson, Rossetti and the Rhetoric of Sexuality' in *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985) pp. 569-93

Hönnighausen, Gisela, *Christina Rossetti als viktorianische Dichterin* (Bonn; U. P., 1969)

-----, 'Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti' in *Victorian Poetry* 10 (1972) pp. 1-15

Jimenez, N., *The Bible and the Poetry of Christina Rossetti: A Concordance* (London; Greenwood Press, 1979)

Kent, David, A., ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1987)

-----, 'Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti's Poems' in *Victorian Poetry* 17 (1979) 259-64

-----, 'W. M. Rossetti and the Editing of Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry' in *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* 1 (1978) pp. 18-26

Kohl, James A., 'A Medical Comment on Christina Rossetti' in *Notes and Queries* CCXIII (November 1968) pp. 423-4

Mayberry, Katherine J., *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Discovery* (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State U. P., 1989)

McGann, Jerome, J., 'Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation' in *Victorian Studies* XXIII (1980) pp. 237-54

-----, 'The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti' in *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983) 127-44

McGillis, 'Simple Surfaces: Christina Rossetti's Work for Children' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 208-30

Mermin, Dorothy, 'Heroic Sisterhood in *Goblin Market*' in *Victorian Poetry* 21 (1983) pp. 107-18

Michie, Helena, 'The Battle for Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's Strategies for Control in her Sister Poems' in *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* III (May 1983) pp. 38-55

Miller, Nan, 'Christina Rossetti and Sarah Woodruff: Two remedies for a Divided Self' in *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* III (Nov 1982) pp. 68-77

Packer, Lona Mosk, 'Symbol and Reality in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*' in *Publications of the Modern Language Association* LXXIII (1958) 375-85

-----, *Christina Rossetti* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1963)

-----, ed., *The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1963)

Robb, Nesca Adeline, 'Christina Rossetti' in *Four In Exile* (London; Hutchinson, 1948) pp. 82-119

Rosenblum, Dolores, 'Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry: Watching, Looking, Keeping Vigil' in *Victorian Poetry* 20 (1982) pp. 35-50

-----, 'Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 132-56

Rossetti, W. M., ed., *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti* (London; Brown, Langham and Co., 1908)

-----, ed., *The Rossetti Papers, 1862-70: A Compilation* (London; Sands, 1903)

-----, *Some Reminiscences* 2 vols. (London; Brown, Langham and Co., 1906)

Rudd, F. A., 'Christina G. Rossetti' in *Catholic World* V (March 1867) pp. 839-46

Sagan, Miriam, 'Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* and Feminist Literary Criticism' in *Pre-Raphaelite Review* III (1980) pp. 66-76

Sandars, Mary, *The Life of Christina Rossetti* (London; Hutchinson, 1930)

Sawtell, Margaret, *Christina Rossetti* (Oxford; Mowbray and Co., 1955)

Schofield, Linda, 'Being and Understanding: Devotional Poetry of Christina Rossetti and the Tractarians' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 301-21

Shaw, David, 'Poet of Mystery: The Art of Christina Rossetti' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 23-56

Shove, Fredegond, *Christina Rossetti; A Study* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1931)

Sitwell, Edith, 'Christina Rossetti: 1830-94' in *English Women* (London; William Collins, 1942) pp. 41-3

Stanwood, P. G., 'Christina Rossetti's Devotional Prose' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 231-47

Stuart, Dorothy, *Christina Rossetti* (London; Macmillan, 1930)

Swinburne, Algernon C., 'A New Year's Eve, Christina Rossetti Died December 29, 1894' in *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne Poetical Works*, 6 vols. (London; Heinemann, 1925) pp. 234-5

Tennyson, George B., 'Afterword: Love God and Die - Christina Rossetti and the Future' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 346-55

Thomas, Eleanor, *Christina Georgina Rossetti* (New York; Columbia U. P., 1931)

Troxell, Janet Camp, *Three Rossettis: Unpublished Letters to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina and William* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard U. P., 1939)

Watson, Jean, "'Men Sell Not Such In Any Town": Christina Rossetti's Goblin Fruit of Fairy Tale' in *Children's Literature* 12 (1984) pp. 61-77

Weathers, Winston, 'Christina Rossetti: the Sisterhood of Self' in *Victorian Poetry* 3 (1965) pp. 81-89

Wenger, Helen, 'The Influence of the Bible in Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata*' in *Christian Scholar Review* 3 (1973) pp. 15-24

Whitla, William, 'Questioning the Convention: Christina Rossetti's Sonnet Sequence *Monna Innominata*' in Kent, *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* pp. 82-131

Woolf, Virginia, "'I am Christina Rossetti'" in *The Common Reader: Second Series* (London; Hogarth, 1932) pp. 237-44

Zaturenska, Marya, *Christina Rossetti; A Portrait with a Background* (New York; Macmillan, 1949)

3. GENERAL

Abrams, M. H., *The Mirror and the Lamp; Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London; Oxford U. P., 1963)

Adair, Patricia, M., *The Waking Dream: A Study of Coleridge's Poetry* (London; Edward Arnold, 1967)

Alighieri, Dante, *Purgatorio* A Verse Translation by Allen Mandelbaum, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1982)

Allingham, William, *The Fairies* (London; Thos. de la Rue, 1883)

-----, *A Diary* ed. Allingham, H., and Radford, D., (London; Macmillan, 1907)

Armstrong, Isobel, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth Century Poetry* (Sussex; Harvester, 1982)

Arnold, Matthew, *Poetical Works* ed. Tinker, C. B. and Lowry, H. F., (London; Oxford U. P., 1950)

Bald, R. C., 'Coleridge and *The Ancient Mariner*' in *Nineteenth Century Studies* (Ithaca; 1940) pp. 39-40

Barthes, Roland, *Image-Music-Text* Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London; Fontana, 1977)

Bateson, F. W., 'The Quickest Way Out of Manchester' in *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London; Longmans, 1950)

Belsey, Catherine, 'The Romantic Construction of the Unconscious' in Barker, F. ed., *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-84* (London; Methuen, 1986)

Bettelheim, Bruno, *The Uses of Enchantment* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1978)

Bloom, Harold, *The Visionary Company, A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (New York; Doubleday, 1961)

-----, ed, *Romanticism and Consciousness; Essays in Criticism* (New York; Norton, 1970)

-----, *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (London; University of Chicago Press, 1971)

-----, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (London; Harvard U. P., 1989)

Blake, Kathleen, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature; The Art of Self-Postponement* (Sussex; Harvester, 1983)

Blake, William, *Poems* ed. Stevenson, W. H., (London; Longmans, 1971)

Bowra, C. M., *The Romantic Imagination* (London; Oxford U. P., 1949)

Bray, Mrs E. A., (Stothard), *A Peep at the Pixies* (London; Grant and Griffith, 1854)

Breton, André, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Michigan; University Press, 1972)

Brown, J. A. C., *Freud and the Post-Freudians* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1964)

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh; Nimmo, Hay and Mitchell, 1912)

Carlyle, Thomas, *Past and Present* (London; Centenary Edition, 1897)

Chandler, Alice, *A Dream of Order: The Mediaeval Idea in Nineteenth Century English Literature* (Lincoln; Nebraska U. P., 1970)

Caine, T. Hall, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London; Elliot Stock, 1882)

- Chetwynd, Tom, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London; Paladin, 1982)
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Complete Poetical Works* ed. Coleridge, E. H., (Oxford; Clarendon, 1912)
- , *Notebooks* ed., Coburn, K., 3 vols. (London; Routledge, 1962)
- Colie, Rosalie L., *Paradoxia Epidemica: the Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton; Princeton U. P., 1966)
- Darwin, Charles, *The Descent of Man* (London; Murray, 1871)
- Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference* (London; Routledge, 1978)
- Dobbs, B. and J., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Alien Victorian* (London; Macdonald, 1977)
- Doughty, Oswald, *A Victorian Romantic; Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London; Frederick Muller, 1949)
- , and Wahl, J. R. ed., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 4 vols. (New York; Oxford U. P., 1965)
- Drayton, Michael, *Poems* ed. Buxton, J., (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953)
- Duffy, M., *The Erotic World of Faery* (St. Albans; Panther, 1974)
- Edwards, Paul, 'Ambiguous Seductions: 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', 'The Faerie Queene' and 'Thomas the Rhymer' in *Durham University Journal* (July 1990) pp. 199-203
- Eliot, T. S., *The Sacred Wood* (London; Methuen, 1920)
- , *The Waste Land* (London; Faber, 1922)
- , *Collected Poems* (London; Faber, 1936)
- , *Selected Prose* ed. Kermode, F., (London; Faber, 1975)
- Elton, O., *A Survey of English Literature (1830-90)* 2 vols. (London; O. U. P., 1920)
- Evans, B. Ifor, *English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century* (London; Methuen, 1933)
- Eyesenk, H. J., *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1963)
- Ford, Ford Madox, (pseud. Hueffer) *The Critical Attitude* (London; Duckworth, 1911)

- Fowler, A., *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge; Cambridge U. P., 1970)
- Franz, Marie L., *Problems of the Feminine in Fairytales* (Texas; Spring, 1972)
- Fraser, Robert S. ed., *Essays on the Rossettis* (Princeton; Princeton University Library, 1972)
- Freud, Sigmund, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (London; Hogarth, 1967)
- Frye, Northrop, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered* (London; Columbia U. P., 1973)
- Fuller, John, *The Sonnet* (London; Methuen, 1972)
- Gettings, F., *Visions of the Occult* (London; Hutchinson, 1987)
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Gubar, Susan, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven; Yale U. P., 1968 rpt.)
- Going, William, *Scanty Plot of Ground: Studies in the Victorian Sonnet Cycle* (The Hague; Mouton and Co., 1976)
- Harrison, Antony H., *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology* (Charlottesville; Virginia U. P., 1990)
- Hartman, Geoffrey H., *The Unmediated Vision* (New Haven; Yale U. P., 1954)
- , ed., *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Wordsworth* (London; Meridian, 1970)
- , 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness' in Bloom ed., *Romanticism and Consciousness* pp. 46-56
- Heath-Stubbs, John, *The Darkling Plain: A Study of the Later Fortunes of Romanticism in English Poetry* (London; Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950)
- Hickok, Kathleen, *Representations of Women: Nineteenth Century British Women's Poetry* (London; Greenwood, 1984)
- Hill Jnr., R. W., ed., *Tennyson's Poetry: Norton Critical Edition* (New York; Norton, 1971)
- Hillman, J., *Revisioning Psychology* (London; Harper Colophon, 1977)
- Holmes, George, *Dante* (Oxford; Oxford U. P., 1980)
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 'A Voice from the World. Fragments of "An Answer to Miss Rossetti's "Convent Threshold"' in *Notebooks and Papers* ed. House, H., (London; Oxford U. P., 1937)
- Hough, Graham, *The Last Romantics* (London; Methuen, 1947)

Houghton, Walter, E., *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven; Yale U. P., 1957)

-----, and Stange, G. R. eds., *Victorian Poetry and Poetics* (Boston; Houghton Mifflin, 1968)

Hume, Kathryn, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (London; Methuen, 1984)

James, Henry, *The Turn of the Screw* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1984)

Jung, Carl Gustav, *Selected Writings* Selected and introduced by Anthony Storr (London; Fontana, 1983)

Keats, John, *Poems* ed. Allott, Miriam, (London; Longmans, 1920)

Keightley, Thomas, *The Fairy Mythology* 2 vols. (London; 1828)

Kroeber, K., *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison; Wisconsin U. P., 1960)

Lind, R. L., *Lyric Poetry of the Italian Renaissance* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1954)

Macmillan, George A., ed., *Letters of Alexander Macmillan* (London; Macmillan, 1908)

McGann, Jerome J., *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford; Clarendon, 1985)

Mermin, Dorothy, 'The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*' in *English Literature and History* 48 (1981) pp. 351-67

Milton, John, *Poems* ed. Carey, J., and Fowler, A., (London; Longman, 1966)

Mommsen, Theodore E., 'Petrarch's Conception of The Dark Ages' in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* ed. Rice Jnr., E. F., (Ithaca, 1959) pp. 106-29

Montefiore, Jan, *Feminism and Poetry* (London; Pandora, 1987)

Mulford, Wendy, 'Notes On Writing' in Michelene Wandor, ed. *On Gender and Writing* (London; Pandora, 1983)

Oppenheimer, Paul, *The Birth of the Modern Mind: Self, Consciousness and the Invention of the Sonnet* (London; Oxford U. P., 1989)

Petrarca, Francesco, *Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Works* (Oxford; Oxford U. P., 1985)

Poulet, G., 'Timelessness and Romanticism' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* XV (London; 1954) pp. 36-52

Prescott, F. C., *The Poetic Mind* (New York; Cornell U. P., 1959)

- Prickett, S., *Victorian Fantasy* (Sussex; Harvester, 1979)
- Rajan, Tillotama, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (London; Cornell U. P., 1980)
- Reide, David G., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (London; Cornell U. P., 1983)
- Robson, W. W., *Critical Essays* (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966)
- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *The Early Italian Poets together with Dante's Vita Nuova* (London; Smith, Elder and Co., 1861)
- , *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham 1854-70* ed. Hill, G. B., (London; T. Fisher Unwin, 1897)
- , *Poems and Translations 1850-70* (London; Oxford U. P., 1913)
- Rossetti, Gabriele, *La Beatrice di Dante* (London; Privatera, 1842)
- , *A Versified Autobiography* Translated and supplemented by W. M. Rossetti (London; Sands, 1903)
- Rossetti, Maria Francesca, *A Shadow of Dante* (London; Rivingtons, 1871)
- Rossetti, William Michael, 'Gabriele Rossetti: Obituary' in *Spectator* 6 May 1854
- , ed., *Ruskin; Rossetti; Pre-Raphaelitism* (London; George Allan, 1899)
- , *The Diary of W. M. Rossetti 1870-3* ed. Bornand, O., (Oxford; Clarendon, 1977)
- Rycroft, Charles, *The Innocence of Dreams* (London; Hogarth 1979)
- Shakespeare, William, *Antony and Cleopatra* (New York; New American Library, 1963)
- , *Hamlet* (New York; New American Library, 1963)
- , *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1980)
- , *Sonnets* ed. Rowse, A. L., (London; Macmillan, 1964)
- Shaw, W. David, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London; Athlone, 1987)
- Shelley, Percy B., *Complete Works* 10 vols. ed. Ingpen, R., and Peck, W. E., (London; Ernest Benn, 1965)

Showalter, Elaine, *A Literature Of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton; Princeton U. P., 1977)

Spenser, Edmund, *Amoretti* (New York; De Capo, 1969)

-----, *The Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser* Edited with an introduction by Alexander Dunlop, (London; Yale U. P., 1989)

Stoppard, Tom, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (London; Faber, 1967)

Tennyson, George B., *Victorian Devotional Poetry* (Cambridge Mass.; Harvard U. P., 1981)

Thorbly, Anthony, ed., *The Romantic Movement* (London; Longmans, 1966)

Vicinus, Martha, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London; Indiana U. P., 1972)

Waller, R. D., *The Rossetti Family 1824-54* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1932)

Warner, Alan, *William Allingham* (London; Associated University Presses, 1975)

Weintraub, S., *Four Rossettis: A Victorian Biography* (London; W. H. Allen, 1978)

Welsh, Andrew, *The Roots of Lyric* (Princeton; University Press, 1978)

Wordsworth, William, *Poetical Works* (London; Edward Moxon, 1869)

-----, and Dorothy, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* 6 vols. ed., De Selincourt, E., Second Edition revised by Shaver, C. L., (Oxford; Clarendon, 1967)

-----, *The Prelude* (Text of 1805) ed., De Selincourt, E., Second edition corrected by Stephen Gill (London; Oxford U. P., 1970)

Wright, David, ed., *Seven Victorian Poets* (London; Heinemann, 1964)